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Yomu Mishima
三嶋与夢
illustration
ともぞ
ヒーロー文庫

Sevens

If You've Got No Material, it's Time to Become Serious, isn't it Sixteenth Generation!?

Author: Wai

Illustrator: Tomozo

Translate: Yoraikun

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Prologue

… A dim, cloudy sky.

As snow fell over Centralle, the capital of the Bahnseim Kingdom was strangely quiet. There were few youths among the people walking the streets. Male youths were especially low in number. It wasn't as if the snow was the only reason no one wandered.

The light leaking from buildings was similarly few. When it should have been the main street of the capital, a number of stores had closed the doors, with notices of absences posted up front.

It was surely cold out the window, but watching the outside scenery from the room, such a thing was irrelevant to Celes. The heating unit Magic Tool was operational, and the room was warm. The rapier she held in her left hand, from the shape of the scabbard, and the ornamentation of the hilt, it was made to look like a staff.

From the yellow Jewel embedded in its hilt, a voice came towards Celes, who looked out the window with a grin on her face.

『War piling on war, heavy taxation. How does it feel to watch the insects working for your sake wear themselves away?』

Unlike Lyle's Blue Jewel, there was only one mind recorded in the Yellow Jewel. 【Agrissa】 who inherited a portion of Septem's memory, and dropped the continent into hell… She carved her own memory into the Jewel.

"It's terribly interesting. But seeing them weaken so much in such a short period of time…"

Celes looked down, a sorrowful expression on her face. Her gold hair carried a light wave, covering her expression as she looked down. That glimmering hair, and sorrowful blue eyes… but as she slowly raised the corners of her lips, she produced a course smile.

"… They really are insects after all. While calling themselves the capital of Bahnseim, this is all it takes to ruin them, after all. I'd

have liked it if they entertained me more.”

Agrissa was a little impressed. Not at Celes’ current form. For she was once called the beautiful siren of the country herself. Carrying on only Septem’s memory of pain, she had chosen to wield her power for her own sake, and that alone.

『It’s more fun to torment them by wringing them bit by bit. Well, you’re still young. Having a bit of flexibility in your heart is a good thing. But it sure is amusing to see Bahnseim fall like this.』

Watching the city of Centralle lose its energy day by day was an extremely amusing thing for Agrissa. They were once enemies… but that wasn’t all.

Bahnseim had once sworn allegiance to her. Meaning he was a provincial feudal noble who obeyed her rule. Even while receiving her grace, he had changed sides the moment the situation took a turn.

When Celes spoke with Agrissa, she would use the room at the very top of the palace. No one was allowed to enter, the two of them could enjoy their little chats alone.

Celes smiled as she spoke, as if remembering something.

“Right. Father is going to return from the territory soon. I have to prepare to welcome him. Mother stayed with me, but father had work, so he can’t always be around.”

Age-wise it was around time for her to develop angst for her parents, or resentment for her father. But Celes held affection for her parents alone. And Agrissa was the same.

『Ah, right. Your father sure is busy. My dad was a lower end imperial noble, but he did quite a bit for me… my siblings were in the way so I drove them out, but after I made it to the inner palace, I gave him a government position and this and that to return the favor.』

Parents were special… this did not apply to brothers and sisters. Celes and Agrissa shared the sentiment. It was all due to the

influence of the goddess' memories.

"It'll have to be a party, and I'll have to prepare a present… oh, I'll have to get mother a new dress as well!"

Celes' form as she gleefully spoke, rather than charming, she was like a child. There, a knock came at the door. Once Celes gave permission, the automaton Burt entered the room.

A butler-model automaton, with the appearance of a charming young man. His red hair and blue eyes were exceedingly pretty. If someone who didn't know better caught sight of him, they would surely believe he was human.

"Celes-sama, Bahnseim's army on the eastern front was breached. It was a crushing defeat, it seems. The royal guard was also annihilated. Captain Breid is confirmed dead. Our casualties number in the ten thousands."

Hearing that, Celes smiled at Burt.

"Is that so? But right now, I don't have time for such trifling things. My father told me before, you win some, and you lose some. More importantly, father is coming to Centralle. In order to see me! So we need a grand welcoming. Burt, could you arrange it for me?"

It seems she was uninterested. Burt showed a fed-up expression. If anyone else did that in front of Celes, the torture would start on the spot. But Burt was an automaton. He was capable of all sorts of work, and was Celes' favorite toy.

"I thought you would say that, so I've already made the preparations. But the national treasury is in dire straits."

A life of luxury, and with large wars raging on all over the place, the national treasure of the superpower Bahnseim was in a terrible state. Not that Celes cared.

"More importantly, father! We need to give a grand welcome to father who does his work, and kills the insects who don't obey me!"

To Celes, Burt spoke.

“It will effect the official ceremonies of Bahnseim. His royal highness, and the other royalty down the line are expectantly waiting for you to make your appearance.”

Celes tilted her head.

“Eh? I’m not showing up at something like that? Why would I do that when father is coming? I can’t believe it! I definitely won’t let Rufus into my bedroom anymore!”

Burt shrugged. He offered a rebuttal to those words.

“You’ve never even let him in once. As far as I know, and I’ve heard never before then either. When you let all your favorites in, I’m surprised you can say such a thing.”

Celes showed an angry face. An angry expression that was cleverly made to look cute. As Burt was an automaton, his rude attitude was permitted.

“I mean… once I stole him from that woman, I just lost interest. Hmph.”

A laughing voice came from the Jewel.

『It’s the theft itself that’s interesting. I guess it’s a common tale. But the current me has something I want to take no matter what… though they always keep it by their side.』

Letting Agrissa’s voice slide, Celes spoke words of the grand party she would hold for her parents as she waltzed out the room…

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『So the theft itself was the fun part…』

The one who let out such a voice from the Jewel was the Third.

The Rhuvenns Kingdom… a room of its under-repair castle, had become my office. It had originally been used by General Blois, but saying he had to go train his soldiers, he had shoved his work onto me.

The mountain of paperwork before me were the reports of Rhuvenns and Beim alongside Adele-san's complaints. Short on hands. The merchants won't listen to me. The residents are loud about money, at this point she was just complaining.

I was looking over such papers, the only other one in the room being Monica. The rule of Beim, divided into north and south. On top of that, Rhuvenns… I held my head at the overwhelming lack of personnel.

Having come so far, the Seventh spoke.

『Well, with territory problems, it's usually because you have abundance of people that you go out and invade thinking you can handle it. If you have a firm selection of retainers, and rely on blood relation to gather people, I'm sure your rule will be possible.』

As I has unskillfully gotten my hands on a large territory, our shortage of hands only became even more severe.

"… After you take it, it's just a pain."

After fierce battle after fierce battle was over, there was much to do in postwar processes, and new rule and such. What's more, the land ruled by Beim's merchants and the adventurers' Guild… they weren't used to a system with a ruling class.

The door opened, and there came Lianne-san taking two Valkyrie units along. Her face was smiling, but she looked somewhat worn out.

"Now, Lyle-dono… here's your second serving. Keep on hammering those forms out"

The Valkyries placed their new paper mountains on the desk prepared to receive new documents.

“Ah, by the way, these ones are the urgent ones.”

She said as she left a smaller mountain before my eyes. Seeing my face, perhaps she sensed what I wanted to say as she opened her mouth.

“I’ll just throw this out there, but I did check over them already. After removing everything that wasn’t completely necessary, this is what’s left. If you’ve become a ruler, you should understand how much responsibility and obligation comes with the title, right? … And, if you plan to reign over the entire continent, your work load won’t be anything as measly as this. It’s around time you start thinking up a way of rule with higher efficiency.”

I could only nod at Lianne-san’s words. From the Jewel, I could hear the Third and Seventh.

『As expected, a princess who knows how to govern a single country is different. I’m sure she’s got quite a bit of knowhow with her.』

『Serious talk here, the back line, or rather the desk side’s shorthandedness is becoming more severe. Lyle, you… once you get your hands on the continent, no matter how tedious, you have to prepare a system of rule that can be passed down the ages.』

A country ruled by a hero… with the fame, it was an easy way to go about it. But when generations piled up, problems would come out.

“… At this rate, I’ll be tasting the pain of the First and Second simultaneously.”

The First who built up a village where there was nothing.

And the one who got the first’s village in order and followed behind, the Second.

The Third sounded impressed.

『I’m surprised you noticed. If you had those two with you, you might get some surprisingly interesting advice. But that’s impossible for us, mind you.』

Lianne made a perplexed face, so I said, “It’s nothing,” and said she could go. But she didn’t leave.

“Come to think of it, right before I came here, I heard. It seems your post-Growth has quite a gap or something. I heard rumors that you’d laid hands on the former Holy Maiden.”

“Eh? From who!? Rather, I didn’t lay hands on her…”

Lianne left the paperwork behind, and looked at the Valkyries that had gone into cleaning up the room.

“You two!”

The two Valkyries touched their mouths.

“Master, it was a little game. A game of make belief. We were supplied with maid uniform, and our tensions high, we merely started gossiping a bit amongst ourselves. And Lianne-sama just happened to be in the immediate vicinity, there wasn’t anyone else around.”

Expressionless with black hair and red eyes, the Valkyries used the cores of the maid automatons who were originally Monica’s sisters. For that sake, they had some strong lingering attachment to maid clothing, it seems.

Lianne scoffed.

“When they suddenly started gossiping in my room, I had no idea what was going on. Well, it was a report they sent out to all units, it seems. It sure is convenient. It’s quite a skill. If you station Valkyries all over the lands, you’ll get your hands on all sorts of information in no time.”

Hearing that, I let out a sigh.

“It’s because it’s me that it’s possible. Even if it’s possible to use it in rule, that will end with my generation. So if possible, I’m looking for a way to rule without it.”

They were proficient automatons, but there was a problem. At

present, their exchanges with far-away parties was realized through my Skill【Connection】, and if it wasn't active, these conversations would be impossible.

Also, the number of cores was limited, and even if we wanted to produce more units, this was the limit… even Damien couldn't make cores.

Lianne looked at my face, nodding a few times.

"It's a good thing to think of what comes next. Of course, it's all a tale of after you win it all. But even so, it isn't a period to think of war potential alone. You need to prepare a bureaucracy capable of handling office work. We're shorthanded, so maybe you should take applications outside of nobility. Rather than searching for talent, suppressing it with numbers would be more important in our current state."

I reached a hand for an urgent document, and reading through it I spoke.

"I know. Proceed with your education plan. The fact you're telling me this means you already started preparing, right? But I'd like it if you confirmed it with me next time."

Lianne looked a little surprised.

"You're no fun at all. I thought I would surprise you. Ah, right."

Wondering if there was anything more, I raised my head to see her making a serious face.

"I never heard who you would be making the legal wife. Can you decide sometime soon? I have to go suck up to them."

With a dumbfounded expression, I dropped the papers, the Third giving a joyful voice from the Jewel.

『That's right, I was waiting for this. The Fourth is just about the only one who would enjoy this boring desk scene, I was waiting for a topic like this!』

The Seventh spoke in a serious tone.

『To crumble the equilibrium immobilized by check and restraint, could it be this princess of Faunbeux… I thought Galleria or Rusworth, or perhaps the queen of Cartaffs would make their move. I was careless. It feels like a bomb was lobbed in from an unexpected angle.』

The Third was the same.

『I'm the same. I thought this child would move after she made a faction to some extent. Well, it's fine if it's all muddled, but assassination alone you should avoid. Lyle, make sure you keep on your toes.』

No, if you say it like that, it's as if you're telling me to permit it as long as it doesn't reach murder, right? Rather, it looks like they'd grown accustomed to it these days as they blatantly enjoyed the carnage around me.

… These guys are the worst.

Faction

… Beim's Eastern Guild Branch was functioning as the city's Guild Headquarters.

Adele had borrowed a room to work on Beim's revival, pretty much staying there every night in her daily life of work.

That the Guild had a public bath and lodging facility, and workable environment was a large contributing factor. Simultaneously, she herself wouldn't use the high-class lodging facilities, as while the place functioned as a workplace, it also had to deal with the visitors that came every day.

Adele sat on the leather-coated sofa, talking with a former guild executive, a low table in-between them. The other party was from the north branch… the executive who once led adventurers in relation to the port.

"Beim has always managed its port to now! What is the meaning of one-sidedly snatching it away!?"

Despite the thin rings forming under Adele's eyes, she used the tea with a harsh bite poured in her cup to maintain consciousness.

(Really, please, just go away already. I'm busy here… there are no seats left here for you guys.)

Beim had fallen. At the time, the upper echelon had swiftly pulled out. For that sake, and with the emotions of the city manipulated by Lyle's party, its impression of them was the worst. In essence, he had lied about his name to enter the east branch functioning as headquarters.

Maksim was standing behind the sofa, beside him a few female knights as well. They were borrowed from the four-nation alliance, but as there were Valkyries around as well, Adele was relieved.

"… I'm sure your people already understand, Beim no longer recognizes your order. That is why you lied about your name when

you requested this meeting, isn't?"

Adele saw her opponent's expression warp vexingly. Rather than not having the leisure to care, this really was just a waste of time.

What Lyle wanted was the Guild's knowhow, and the executives who held massive power… and abused it were unnecessary.

"… I would like to plead acceptance for a portion of the merchants and Guild executives who came to cooperate in the development of Beim. It can even be South Beim. We haven't come emptyhanded. You need information about the Labyrinth the city managed, don't you?"

Sensing what Adele wanted, the executive offered information. But Adele uninterestedly supped her tea.

"No thank you. We already have the documents. We're going to have a Labyrinth-specialized party from South Beim come over here as well. And the adventurers' Guild will fall under the management of the country. The alliance had already proceeded talks in such a manner. In Cartaffs and Djanpear as well, they've easily shifted it that way. Faunbeux has shown sympathy for our opinion."

"W-what relevance does that have to this matter?"

Adele drained her tea, leaving the cup on the table.

"Plenty relevance. To be blunt, you are unnecessary — a hindrance even."

The executive stood. His hair was a mess, and his clothes were a little dirty as well. It was evident he hadn't live a decent life since his flight. That he came to Beim must have been because he was considerably pressed.

"You can't mean you'll take our legal property at the port…"

Adele's expression didn't change.

"Well let's see. A reward was necessary for our assistance in this endeavor, so yes, we took away your property. Using reception and

fees to set up shop at the port as a reason, there seem to be quite a few people who've found themselves quite exploited."

"Y-you lot…"

Here, Adele disclosed the secret of the trick.

"It not like everything went as we wanted. But you and your merry friends danced on Lyle-san's palm just as he thought you would. We're already done with you. But…"

Seeing her opponent's mortified face, Adele spoke.

"… If you plan on selling us the management knowhow, we'll pay a considerable price for it. If you accept that deal alongside your exile sentence… we won't have to make use of more-violent means."

The surrounding knights pulled their swords. And Maksim readied his spear.

"W-what are…"

Adele stood.

"Are you the ones who exiled us first? And a few other executives have already sold their knowledge and left Beim. If you hand over profitable information soon, we will have no choice but to pay an adequate reward for it."

The former executive gripped his hair with both his hands, and looked down. Regretfully, but while considering the sum he could get if he sold the knowhow he possessed…

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… Tanya had come to see off her former-executive superior.

Similarly, alongside a group leaving Beim, he had decided to move

to the countryside with his family. Tanya was the only one who came to see him.

Her superior smiled as he always did.

“You sure are faithful. You didn’t have to come see me off. You know what sort of treatment we’re receiving in Beim, right?”

Tanya looked down.

“I’m still in debt to you for picking me up. And when you’re the one who stayed in Beim to the end…”

Her superior gave a powerless laugh.

“There’s no helping it. Even if it’s exile, it’s just from Beim… no, just the city sector of North Beim. I was able to pull out those conditions. I’m not confident I can live too far off, so I do think it turned out fine.”

Tanya raised her face, and made a serious expression. Clenching her fist, and she made a proposal.

“Thinking of your ability, you’ll be necessary to the city from here on. If you ask Adele-san…”

“… Give her a –sama. She is substantially the representative ruler of Beim. And if I’m there, the guild personnel will turn to me. By my way of doing things, it’s fated to revert to the old Guild ways. What I and they seek is fundamentally different. So it will eventually birth cracks… and I’m already tired. With my reward, I formed a pioneering corp. I think I’m going to take it easy, so think you could keep out of the way, Tahnia?”

Tahnia was Tanya’s other name. Her name as a Sweeper. When her superior gave out orders he didn’t want to, he’d give them to Tahnia rather than Tanya.

“… I’m sorry.”

“Sorry. But I can’t stay here. And life out there isn’t too bad. Rather, whether North Beim can really be rebuilt or not… you’re going to

have it rough, Tanya."

The two laughed lightly before parting at Beim's gate…

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"… Hah?"

I think I let out quite a stupid sound.

In the office of Rhuvenns' castle, I found myself amazed upon hearing Novem's report on her arrival.

"No, as I was saying, about your maids. At present, the only one in a standing where they can look after you is Shannon-chan. But rather than look after, she…"

It felt as if I was looking after her. While she had gotten able to do this and that on her own, Shannon was fundamentally unsuited to battle.

Listening to Monica, Novem, or perhaps Miranda's orders and helping out was the most she could do. Even if she had Demon Eyes, she was junk who couldn't master them. I was surprised that Shannon was even being considered my maid, but…

"No, there's Monica and the Valkyries, they're much more skilled than any attendant."

There, Novem's gentle smile suddenly turned scary.

"That would be troublesome! Lyle-san, understand that we're short-staffed right now. Monica-san and the Valkyries have work to do. You have to leave what can be left to the maid. And… there's already been pressure for the maid role. At my place, the topic has come out a few times transmitted through Eva-san."

"Eh? I never heard of it."

There, the Third let out an impressed voice from the Jewel.

『In my era, maid was a role reserved for the talented girls and the daughters of our notable houses. It was treated as a few years of education and training for no charge. Though I ended up taking in the daughters of the houses that lost their bread earners in the war as well.』

The Seventh seemed quite intrigued by the Third's take.

『It changes by the scale of the territory. In my time, while there was still the education side to it, I also hired maids for the work. The daughters of vassals would work in the Walt House a few years, and that made for their bridal training. But… thinking of the statue Lyle is aiming for, it has to be that.』

『Definitely that. Mistress candidates maid in name, or mistress assistants, right? Uwah, I've read it before in a book. That one came out quite bloody.』

When the Third was letting out an unpleasant voice, he sounded like he was enjoying himself. The Seventh was the same.

『Because women like those sorts of story, that sort of thing came out a few times. From a man's point of view, it's nothing to laugh about, but… I see, so Lyle's going to be burdened with such a muddy inner palace.』

No, I don't want to. Personally, I'd like to refuse.

"Y-you mean like a helper, right? Um, what sort of girls are the maid candidates?"

Still with a serious expression, Novem.

"At present, I can't say the outcome, but it is limited. If it's going to be noble daughters, the first and second daughters of a Count House in Cartaffs have voiced their desire. Of the elven tribes, hunters and performers… some raised their names under the condition they would be helping Eva-san as well. Talks have come from dwarves and gnomes as well. At present, you do not discriminate against demi-human races, so they wish to use this opportunity to raise

their status, or perhaps aim to maintain that status quo.”

When I was being chased by Bahnseim countermeasures, my own allies were bringing in problems.

“… Isn’t that definitely related to the factions? I don’t like muddled factional wars.”

There, the Third laughed.

『Factions form in the smallest villages, you know? If you’ve got three people, there’ll be a faction. You’ve got to control them well. Rather, we just talked about this!』

The Seventh was the same.

『They’ll form regardless. It’s often the case they form unintentionally. But Lyle… don’t gather everyone in the Jewel again. We’ve learned our lesson. We don’t want that again! … As I thought, one wife is enough. Yep.』

I wanted one too. Yet with everything you guys have said, it’s not only my fault it snowballed like this! … I think.

Novem smiled.

“Give up. I’m trying to pay as much mind as I can to whatever would become a burden on you. But not just the maids…”

“Yes?”

“… There are factions forming in the army as a whole. Maksim-dono pledged his allegiance to Adele-san, so the only ones who have actually sworn loyalty to you would be Baldoir-dono and Blois-dono. But Blois-dono is scraping up soldiers from Bahnseim, while the others are gathering around Baldoir-dono.”

“Eh? Baldoir was doing something like that?”

The Third sounded fed up.

『As. I. Was. Saying! They need a rival horse, so they got close to

your close associate Baldoir-kun. I doubt the man himself wished for it.』

Novem looked at me.

“And within the four-nation alliance, Lorphys is a bit of a problem.”

“There’s more!?”

“Within the alliance, Lorphys alone hasn’t put out any woman close to you. Because of that, its contributions within the alliance are low, and its morale is lowering. When it’s surrounded by countries on our side, I don’t think they’ll secede, but…”

But? When we’re so busy, why are they feuding over that? I don’t think I’m wrong for thinking it, and I think that isn’t actually wrong. But the Seventh looked at my situation and noticed.

『Hmm, Lyle. When you get larger in scale, these sorts of problem will come out no matter what. Give up.』

“Got it. I’ll do something about it… Is it that? We’re short-staffed in various places?”

Novem nodded with her smile. Her smile was so cute I decided to forgive.

“Yes. To be honest… even if we win, we don’t have personnel capable of maintaining the continent. While we do have a considerable number of soldiers, rear support alongside looking after you… Monica-san has her physical limitations.”

When we hadn’t even won, why do I have to mull over all this? I’d like it if they concentrated on the war just a bit more.

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… Clara looked at the mass-produced Porter model taken from

Bahnseim.

Gathering magicians- what's more, low ranking ones- she was teaching them golem magic. The practice mass-produced Porter was truly made just as if it were a wagon with no horse.

Simple and sturdy. But it demanded competence form its user.

Sitting on a wooden crate watching her, Damien yawned. He had collected data from the Valkyries, and spent another night up analyzing it.

Having returned to South Beim, Clara got into training personnel capable of using Porter. Saying she wanted expert advice, she dragged Damien out.

But the man in question.

"… This is no good. If you don't modify the golem, they won't be able to use it. Wouldn't it be better if you shortened the period, and remade it easier to control?"

Clara corrected her misaligned glasses.

"As I thought."

"If you already know, don't ask me. You've already got a considerable amount of experience operating Porter, and you already had talent from the start. That's why you can control the current Porter. When it comes to Porter, aren't you better than me?"

Hearing that from Damien who perfected golem magic, Clara was delighted. But that truth conveyed a not-so-delightful truth to her.

"… Meaning to make it usable, we have to remake the golem itself, and make it easier to handle?"

Having his back rubbed by Automaton No. 3 looking after him, Damien spoke.

"Or rather, this one was made terribly. Like, let's just go mass

produce them or whatever… it feels like it was put together in a hurry? If you load with it too much baggage, won't it break?"

Clara looked at Bahnseim's Porter she had gone to lengths to retrieve. Unlike their own Porter, it was hard to develop any affection for the frame built with a demand on function alone.

"… What should I do. Adele was rejoicing at how we could reinforce the back line without having to pay extra."

Damien looked at Clara.

"Ah~, who was that again?"

No. 3 told him with a smile.

"The woman acting as Lyle-dono's representative in South Beim, master."

"Oh that girl! She sure is loud when it comes to money. And wait, it's rare for you to drop the honorifics on someone."

Hearing Clara call her simply Adele, Damien felt it was rare.

"I'm no good with Adele. Hah, do you think it'll pass through if I ask for funding?"

To Clara, Damien smiled.

"Won't it be impossible even with the money? I mean, old Letarta's one thing, but the craftsmen of South Beim are all quite busy. I don't think they can hold down their own plans."

Clara made a serious face.

"… Is that person really supposed to be good at internal affairs?"

She complained about the absent Adele. Damien tilted his head.

"Who knows? She seems good with money? That pink hair…"

"Lianne-san."

No. 3 made a suggestion, but perhaps Damien wasn't uninterested…

"Right, that person was more amazing."

Vice Captain of Lorphys

… Rhuvenns.

Due to Lyle's presence, that country once annihilated by a hoard of monsters was being treated as the headquarters of the alliance. The one who stopped by such a land was an envoy of Lorphys, Alette Baillet.

Regardless of who he was, he moved the alliance, Cartaffs, Djanpear, Faunbeux… a number of countries moved on his command, in order to meet the head of the alliance, Alette's appearance was in order.

Her bob-cut blond hair that extended to her shoulders, with how busy she had been these days, she hadn't had a chance to cut it lately. Using getting her appearance in order as a pretense, Alette was delighted she was able to take it easy for a day.

And the one who shoved enough work on her for her to think that way was actually Lyle, but…

Entering the castle of Rhuvenns, Alette led along her new subordinates. Her old men had been promoted, and were now leading units of their own.

Lorphys was also short on hands, and this time's meeting was in relation to that.

Rounding the gate into the courtyard, she found not temporary repairs, the entire castle was being remodeled to serve as Lyle's base.

She could hear the voices of soldiers training from afar.

Alette's adjutant, a new recruit unraveled his observations.

"Knights of Bahnseim? They're training is too light. If they were knights of Lorphys, that level of training would…"

After he said that much, Alette glared at him. As Lorphys was a

small country, they enforced strict training to make all their warriors into elites. But against similar numbers was one thing, and Alette understood taking on over twice her forces would be difficult.

“You’re laying your foolishness bare. They already have such numbers together, you must know that fact is already a threat. Even if you can brag about the harshness of your training, you must never underestimate your foe.”

Entering the castle, with their guide being a knight of Lorphys, her men looked relieved, letting their guard down. Catching that fact, Alette tightened her own.

Alette led young knights in their late teens. From the start, their shorthandedness was severe. They were knights unable to leave for Beim to see the world, and they couldn’t help but be strong willed.

The guide knight let out a sigh.

“You sure have it rough, vice-captain Alette. And you lot, at the very least, a majority of all the knights and soldiers stationed here have experienced a number of wars on the ten-thousands scale. Don’t say anything too strange to anger them.”

Seeing the fresh knights close their mouths awkwardly, Alette felt a little nervous. But entering the castle, she continued to brace herself…

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Lying over the sofa in the office, I read through papers as I heard Monica’s report.

In order to reconstruct North Beim, they were requesting Novem and Clara. But Clara showed disapproval, and to make practical use of her Porter unit, she requested funding and arrangements to search for craftsmen.

Novem accompanied the magicians, reconstructing a number of villages around Rhuvenns. She wasn't here.

Both Aria and Miranda had left their units to Maksim-san, to lead larger forces of their own.

Eva was busily meeting with the elves, while May was taking Marina-san around… no, speaking from what it looked like from the sizes of their bodies, it looked like Marina-san was leading May… whatever, the two of them were getting rid of monsters within the territory.

And the reason I was lying on the sofa in the middle of work…

"But when you called me over, we're meeting in your office, huh. Perhaps I should think it a good thing you did away with the stiff greetings I'd have to take care of in the audience chamber?"

Queen of Cartaffs Ludmilla-san paid a visit. No, to be more specific, I called her over.

And right now, she was giving me a lap pillow.

Monica looked at me.

"Calling over the queen of a large country out of desire for a lap pillow, I'm sure this chicken is the first? Yet despite that, he never goes any further, so he's a chicken after all. But I think it's nice like this!"

She was happily sticking up her thumb, so rather than the documents, my face turned a little hot at the soft sensation under my head and the two large bulges above me.

The Seventh, quietly.

『… What a nice view.』

The Third sounded a little jealous.

『I'm in the bottom faction, so lap pillows… hah, how envious.』

What should I do. Milleia-san isn't there, so the conversations in the Jewel were inclining towards the vulgar talks among men.

"… Don't be like that. To be honest, Zayin, Galleria and Rusworth are threatening to send someone over, so I'm having them step down for now. Rather, what's going on with Clara?"

Monica's face turned serious.

"She has been denied for now. Clara and Adele have a bad affinity, after all. In regards to Adele' grasp on budget, Clara fundamentally reproduces knowledge from books and the like quite faithfully. Well, I do think they both share a scarcity in application."

If the automaton was saying they were scarce in application, were they really alright? As I was thinking that, Ludmilla-san advocated for Clara.

"Clara has a wealth of knowledge. And she holds knowledge on all sorts of fields. Aren't construction and public works included in that? Then she's necessary for Beim's revival. If you ignore her spending to an extent. So you should probably pull that one called Adele out."

I looked up at Ludmilla.

"That's a surprise. I didn't think you'd come to Clara's aid."

There, Ludmilla laughed a bit.

"You think? I have quite a high evaluation of Clara. She's a proficient one."

But Monica was against Clara's entry into North Beim.

"I'm sure she's a necessity in the current situation. But as long as Professor Damien shows no interest in modifying Porter, the formation of the Porter transportation unit will be difficult. Removing Clara from her post will be bad as a whole."

Ludmilla-san narrowed her eyes a bit.

“A Porter Unit? A few of those machines have made their way to our side… hey, Lyle, won’t you sell me the information? No, give it to me. If we can lower the amount of horse drawn carriages, we can put those horses to other use. I would be able to use that as an explanation for the reason behind this visit, you know?”

There’s no real problem with handing it over. Rather, I planned to do it anyways.

“Very well. But the plan isn’t completed, so it’s only a promise. Please send a few magicians over. Or would you rather have us teach the knights of Cartaffs stationed here, and have them bring the magic home with them?”

There were knights of various countries, and there were a few people who came around to investigate what we were making in South Beim’s factories.

Those moving for the interest of their own countries, and it was coming to a head that the current alliance wasn’t monolithic.

“What, how boring. By your tone, it seems you planned to hand it over from the start.Well, that’s fine in and of itself.”

As Ludmilla-san said that, I spoke to Monica.

“Keep Clara at her station. But once Porter is completed, and we have people capable of moving it, send her to Beim. Until then, send some extra personnel around to Adele-san. For Clara… the craftsmen of South Beim are already surpassing their limits. Have her make a request to the alliance.”

There, Ludmilla-san.

“No, wait a minute. Why not give that request to Cartaffs? We have craftsmen on our shores as well. And we have the leisure. Transportation will be a problem, but are you really at a point where you can worry about such a thing?”

I somewhat understood her thoughts. She wanted Porter’s technology, but more than that, she wanted the groundwork for further technological advancements.

Within our alliance, the movements for each country's interests were getting stronger.

If I didn't defeat Celes soon on my side, it felt as if the alliance would crumble.

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The audience chamber.

I'd used it a few times, but showing the royal castle's once splendor, it was made quite vast and extravagant.

In order to get the advantage in various negotiations, make it as gorgeous as possible, and intimidate the negotiations partner as much as possible… or so spoke its make. Or perhaps it was simply so as not to be made light of. Or someone's hobby.

Monica and Ludmilla-san, on top of her guard knights of Cartaffs were in the room.

Before my eyes, across a large table, Alette-san and her knights of Lorphys were before me.

Alette-san remained mindful of Ludmilla-san.

"Lyle-dono, I've already told you my business in the letters."

I nodded, and spoke to Alette-san as she wore expensive clothing made for meetings.

"The Valkyries have raised the report as well. About Lorphys' standing within the alliance, was it?"

Alette-san's expression was serious.

"We aren't used to this system, so there were quite a few people anxious over whether we were actually able to make contact.

Putting that aside, Lorphys' level of contributions truly are low at the current stage. I recognize that, but it's something for which we had ample reason. Compared to the other three countries, we believe we have provided exceptional contributions to the cause."

Zayin, Lorphys, Galleria… the reason those three nations cooperated with me wasn't only because I had saved them. There had been rumor of Thelma-san and Aura-san in Zayin. Galleria and Rusworth formally declared Gracia-san and Elza-san would be accepting it.

Meaning, from their points of view, they had a marriage relation to me. In Zayin as well, Thelma-san was… let's put that aside.

"I know. So I myself don't have any particular complaints…"

"But that would be troubling! Lorphys has its status within the alliance. The problem that only our country seems to be getting a cold reception is the problem."

I looked at Alette-san.

"There are people saying such things?"

It may be best to get Rauno-san to look into it, but investigating both friend and foe, Rauno-san had quite a bit on his plate already.

Our information network was also short staffed.

"In that matter with Selva, our territory definitely did expand. We are thankful for this time's case as well. But there are many in the country who question any further cooperation."

There, Ludmilla-san burst into laughter.

"What a funny story. There's no way they can back out of the alliance at this point. Every land around Lorphys is already in Lyle's hands. If they think about it, they shall reach their answer at once. If you pull out, you will be making an enemy of everything around you. Lyle isn't naïve enough to leave enemies within as he fights Bahnseim. Otherwise…"

While Alette-san's expression didn't' change, the feelings of her surrounding knights were showing on their faces. Anger and unrest, those sorts of feelings.

I held up a hand to Ludmilla.

"I am thankful for Lorphys' cooperation. If the situation within the country is harsh, I will accept further cooperation at the minimum possible level. And I promise that such a thing will not invite a cold reception from the alliance, a cold reception for Lorphys."

Alette-san's eyebrows moved a bit.

"But with that…!"

Ludmilla-san opened her mouth.

"… Lorphys will have no standing? Say it already. What your group wishes for is Lyle's engagement to your princess, right? But don't forget it. It isn't only me, we have the princess of Faunbeux. And the women who have accompanied Lyle from his early days. You understand it will be no easy task to get a hold here, right?"

I brought her here to intimidate them, but to think she'd go this far… even Alette-san was making a bitter expression. I'm sure she thought to push the crown princess on to me. But even for me, taking in someone Novem rejected was impossible. Rather, I don't want any more. The Third says, it'll work out! But I think I'm already far passed my limit.

From the Jewel, I heard the Seventh's voice.

『There are never equivalent relations among countries. From ancient times, it was impossible to lay everything equal. But it won't be interesting if you have to carry that problem here.』

The Third shared his opinion.

『That's right. It's no fun. And wait, while Lyle has the precepts, from Lorphys' point of view, they'll be screaming don't bring your damn family precepts into this! Or something like that. But it sure is troublesome. Even if they betray and we suppress, the problem is

how to treat them after that. And being too radical is… Ah, I just thought of something nice.♫

It definitely won't be nice. That alone I could understand.

In the audience chamber, Ludmilla-san and Alette-san's voices were rising.

"It's the time for a large move to sweep the continent, yet you flutter about your negotiations of isolation? Or could it be an entreaty? If you wish to turn coat, turn coat already. I'll send out thirty thousand troops for you at once. You don't even have to pay me for it."

"Threatening simply because you're of a large country. Don't forget we pledged cooperation far before you. Is swooping in later and taking off with all the good stuff the principle of your lands?"

The air was tense between the knights of Cartaffs and Lorphys as well.

In such an audience chamber, I apologized from the depths of my heart as I spoke.

"Understood. Marriage has been important from times immemorial. However, at present a marriage to your royal princess is impossible. For I am in a position where I cannot marry into another house. And we cannot leave Lorphys' throne vacant."

There, a wrinkle graced Alette-san's brow.

"But as long as you have a prince or princess with her…"

"And so, I recommend a marriage of leaders. Shall we set up a marriage interview first, Alette-san?"

"… M-me?"

Alette-san's expression… or rather, I didn't let that glimmer in her eyes slip by. I thought.

Sorry, with Baldoir. Not me. The two in the Jewel were…

『Okay, with this, it will be fine when marriage and such comes up within Lorphys!』

『Just like this, let's have Baldoir work hard to win over the alliance… especially Lorphys' camp. Oh right, Lyle… you have to repay the lad on a later date.』

… I'm the worst. I sold out my men.

Marriage Interview

“… What have you done?”

Before Baldoir’s sigh, I fidgeted.

“W-was that no good?”

Baldoir’s work room was narrower than my office. This also owed to the many items lain around, but my office had been made special from the start, I’m sure. I proceeded talks of Alette-san’s marriage interview, and when I called over to Baldoir, he seemed fed up.

“No, my apologies. If it’s an engagement proposed by you, I cannot decline it. Anyways, the other party is the vice-captain of Lorphys, correct? To speak to status, the Randbergh House is a retainer house to the Walts. I don’t think that quite matches.”

“Eh? You can’t decline?”

While I was surprised, I heard voices from the Jewel. The Third spoke to me.

『My time was the same, declining an engagement from your lord is quite a task. Though precepts like those of the Walt House were taken into account by the house I vassaled to. In my case, it was a huge help the Second searched out a bride for me, though.』

The Seventh said something similar.

『You need a considerably adequate reason to decline. But at his age, I think it’s strange if he didn’t have a girl he liked. Lyle, try asking.』

Following the Seventh’s suggestion, I tried asking.

“Do you have anyone else? Someone you like?”

Baldoir’s eyes moved a bit, but focusing on me, he opened his mouth as if he had given up.

“You were under house arrest at the time. You probably heard it, in knowledge alone. I do have someone I like. But she’s a girl of a village I stopped by when suppressing bandits. Marriage wouldn’t really work out.”

Hearing that from Baldoir, I recalled that before the bonds between houses, freedom of love was meaningless. In my case I was engaged to Novem, but it seems Baldoir has someone separate in status.

“So what do you plan to do?”

“I plan to accept. Sure enough, we cannot ignore the problems of Lorphys. If Lorphys withdraws from the alliance, we will need to put in sanctions. If we mistake the adjustments and go too far, the other nations will become nervous. If we’re too light on them, frustration will build up. I’m sure the reactions will vary by country, and it’s a problem we can’t leave be.”

Right. In the case Lorphys withdrew, there was the possibility of sanctions. If the other countries couldn’t accept it, we couldn’t leave it be.

In the worst case, before we settled things with Bahnseim, I’d have to keep the crumbling of the alliance in sight. But what would the other countries think of that? I wasn’t going to lose. That’s how much power I had at the moment. However, even if I won, it would be a victory for that passing moment alone.

While I waited for my fight with Bahnseim, I didn’t want to have to carry some strange explosives.

“… I’m sorry. I remember. My time as an adventurer was so thick, I was on the verge of forgetting my noble life.”

“There’s no helping it. Knowing something and experiencing it are different things. As a condition, I did lay hands on her after the bandit subjugation, so I’d like to consider taking her on as a maid. At the very least, I’ll have to recognize our relationship.”

The Seventh, in a bit of a low voice.

『He really does treasure her. Rather, he does what needs be. If

only Lyle had that sort of leisure.』

There, the Third spoke to the Seventh.

『It's because you made the territory's scale too large, you rarely ever dealt with bandits personally, did you? Even if you did, you were surrounded by retainers? For a village rid of its bandits, it's a common tale for the best girl in the village to be offered. For someone with territory on Baldoir's level, he should be getting those offers quite often, but… from how it sounds, it just one?』

I asked the Third's question.

"One woman? Or all the women you've had relations with?"

Baldoir stared at me.

"… Lyle-sama, please don't think everyone is surrounded by women like you. It's one girl. One. I was in her care when I was subjugating bandits a few years ago. At the time, I too had knowledge alone, and got through with excitement after that. But after that, I tried my best not to stay at that village."

The Third gave a serious voice.

『From the other side's point of view, that's just trouble. When they gave thanks for defeating the bandits, it's as if he refused it. Well, I'm sure Baldoir-kun has his own logic on it.』

Was he so particular because it was his first woman? I couldn't really understand. Baldoir let out a sigh.

"Well I have feelings, and we had some relations after that. I at least want to look after her a bit. So I apologize, but… in the case that I die, if you could prepare some assets for her…"

… I suddenly had a bad feeling about this. But before Baldoir's serious face, it was an air I couldn't joke, so I decided to confirm the girl's location.

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… Alette hung her head in the waiting room.

“… I should’ve brought something besides knight clothes. Why didn’t I prepare a dress? I’m such an idiot!”

The one looking at her was the knight who’d guided her corps through the castle. Rather than fed-up, he tried to sooth her.

“It’s not as if Baldoir-dono has such a selection of clothing either. You only have whatever you came here with. At the very least, as long as your appearance is in order, it shouldn’t be a problem. It it’s something that was decided so suddenly, after all.”

The fresh recruits looked anxiously at that knight.

“Um, is this fine? Our original objective was to…”

The knight shook his head.

“I know. But you all… if we let this chance slip by, then who’s going to marry the vice-captain? Men are a rare commodity. Even if she searches for someone outside of rank, a majority are already married. If this chance slips by, she’s already in dangerous waters as it is.”

Originally, Alette’s platoon’s objective, or at least its official stance was to elevate Lorphys’ status. In truth, they had been sent to establish an engagement between Lyle and Princess Annerinne.

Because if they didn’t do that, their country’s influence would be lowest within the alliance. When the other three countries had relations with Lyle, Lorphys alone… what’s more, they couldn’t even pull out at this point.

Because the moment the succeeded, they would be surrounded by enemies.

The knight looked at the ceiling, before turning to Alette.

“Vice-captain, do you have your marriage form with you?”

Alette raised her face and nodded.

“Eh? Yeah, I have it?”

The new recruits stood dumbfounded. The knight sent a look across them.

“Do you get it? That’s the sort of person she is. She doesn’t have another chance. The princess is still young. But our vice-captain is… she’s a good person, but she has that side of her so… as a knight of Lorphys, I’d rather proceed talks of Lyle-dono and the princess. But as an individual, I want to support our vice-captain. And…”

“And?”

Alette was quietly simulating things to herself. It seems she was preparing answers beforehand to whatever would be asked in the interview.

“If he asks what I do in my free time, I can’t just say train my body, drink and sleep. Last one got mad at that one. Then here, I should cutely say I knit or something domestic… t-that’s no good! I’ve never learned knitting, I’ve never knit a thing in my life! If that’s how it’s going to be, I can just play it off with something vague like admiring flowers and…”

She was so desperate that the male knights around were taken aback.

“… And. This isn’t such a bad talk. He’s one of the leader candidate who’ll be hard to get at later. Right now, he’s just a retainer, but if Lyle-dono wins, he’ll at least make Count. There’s no doubt he’ll stay close as an imperial noble. For Lorphys… for the country, it isn’t so bad, right?”

If it was just for their official stance, it would be a success. Or so the knight explained to the recruits…

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A few hours later.

With all the preparations in place, at a round table set up in the palace courtyard, I sat across Ludmilla-san. Perpendicular, the main cast of Baldoir and Alette-san sat across from one another.

There were guards around, but they were kept to a minimum.

What's more, only female knights. Monica prepared tea and such, but Alette-san hadn't touched it out of nervousness.

As a few minutes passed without anyone saying anything, Ludmilla-san put down her cup. A tink sound rang out as ceramic cup touched plate. It was quiet enough for it to ring out beautifully.

But with the equilibrium broken, Alette-san spoke.

"U-um! What are your hobbies!"

There, Baldoir seemed level-headed.

"I do a little horse riding. Other than that, I've dabbled in a little painting and music, but I'm not at a level where I could call myself any good. And if I could ask something."

"Y-yes!"

The two weren't so far apart in age, but it seems Alette-san's nervousness was terrible. Like she would make a slip of the tongue any time soon. The Third was exhilarated.

『You think her marriage forms will be coming out soon? If her name's already filled in, I think even Baldoir-kun will be surprised.』

The Seventh evaluated Baldoir's level-headedness.

『I can't tell what he's thinking inside at all. But… this serenity, as I

thought, it must be because he knows women. Lyle, you should seriously consider it. A large battle is near. It may not be a bad idea to know women yourself.』

… With the two of you watching from the Jewel, there's no way I'd even think of laying hands on anyone. Rather, learning Baldoir wasn't someone on my side was a shock. I thought I'd be able to have an enjoyable talk with him like with Damien and Maksim-san…

Baldoir stuck his elbows into the table, folding his arms as he looked at Alette-san with a serious expression.

"I understand that this marriage is important. But even though my house owns a town, it's just a small territory. Baronet scale. What's more, it's a retainer house. For heirs to a feudal noble territory, if we marry, you will have to be marrying into my house. And I'm the eldest son of a feudal noble. Even if I come to love you alone, I cannot say I'll never lay hands on another."

The receptions of saved villages, is what he meant. I saved villages in Beim, but such spicy stories never came up once. This must be a difference in custom.

"I-in Bahnseim terms, I would be from imperial noble lineage. Based on what I've heard…"

"That would be troublesome."

Baldoir's voice grew a little strong. His face was the epitome of seriousness.

"My home, the Randbergh House pledged loyalty to the Walt House since we became retainer knights. We're a house that is already entering its sixth generation. My greatest desire in life is for me to fulfill that role."

Alette-san looked serious.

"I-I understand that. I have experience in battle as well! M-my resolve isn't…"

Baldoir nodded.

“I see. Even as a woman, you do have the status as vice-captain. Then you understand my meaning, right? You could do better. And I cannot prioritize Lorphys. I already have a woman with whom I have relations. Yet her status is too low for me to marry her. I plan on inviting her to the mansion as a maid. If you’re sill fine with that, I will take you as legal wife.”

Without even thinking about it, Alette-san…

“U-understood! The maid part was outside of my expectations, but I hear about those sorts of things a lot. If I let this chance slip by, I…”

… Ended up agreeing.

“Eh? Really!?”

I thought she would definitely be reluctant, but maids… she even approved of mistresses.

“A maid or two, if I got angry because he laid hands on them, I wouldn’t be able to get married anymore! I’m serious here, please pipe down! I had imagined even worst conditions… and I’ve heard worse offers a number of times…”

It sounded painfully heartrending. Ludmilla-san, on the other hand.

“For a feudal noble, that’s about the standard fare. If you step onto the battlefield, death is always a possibility. For the sake of leaving successors, having a few women is a common tale. Though there are plenty of tales of failure.”

I looked at Alette, noticing her produce a form from her breast pocket. I snatched it away from her. Why does this person always panic and set herself up for failure?

“G-give it back! B-but I still have more.”

“You’re making me draw back, please stop. I’ll prepare some proper forms on a later date. Now hand over your spares too. Hurry up!”

“No, but… I’ll get anxious if I don’t have them filled out soon, won’t I!?”

“It’s stranger that you’re always carrying them around, notice that already! I seriously worry for you!”

Ludmilla-san turned an eye to the document in my hand. Her expression warped a bit.

“You’re always carrying around something like that? You’ll repel all the men like that.”

I’m pretty sure Ludmilla-san naturally repelled her share of men as well. As I thought such a thing, Baldoir took the form from me.

“Pardon me. I see… it’s a little different from Bahnseim’s form. But I’d better fill out one for Lorphys as well.”

Saying that, he took out a pen, and wrote his name into the form where Alette-san’s was already written in.

The Seventh spoke.

『He’s surprisingly unperturbed.』

The Third sounded a little bored.

『Hah, it’s kinda that, you know. I’m happy it’s working out, but I’d like some more ups and downs.』

I looked at Baldoir.

“Oy, are you sure you shouldn’t consider it a bit more? It’s that. Alette-san… becomes really hyper in her post-Growth and gets out of hand.”

Alette-san stood and grabbed my shoulders.

“Could you stop getting in the way of my happiness!? I’m begging you!”

Seeing her desperately petition, I stayed in my seat, but inched a

little away from her. Ludmilla-san looked a little disappointed.

“Cartaffs was aiming for Baldoir-dono as well, but… well, with this, I’m sure Lorphys will quiet down a bit.”

Baldoir stopped his pen, and looking at my face…

“… Lyle-sama, please look in a mirror already.”

… He said.

Maizel Walt

… The Walt House manor.

There was a man with his gray hair all swept to the back. He traced his maintained beard with a finger as he smiled over the letter that came from Centralle. Leaving the letter on a splendid desk in his office, he turned a sharp glare at the crumpled report beside it.

Turning his eye to his retainer 【Beil Randbergh】 who had come to check on him at the fall of knight, the head of the Walt House 【Maizel Walt】 spoke in a fed-up tone.

“I heard the eastern front had faced defeat, but the scale was beyond my expectations. According to Celes and Claire in Centralle, only a lucky few were able to run away… that disgrace of the Walt House sure got us well!”

To Maizel’s loathsome expression, Beil’s face remained serious.

“Isn’t that fine? The fact only serves to prove even the Walt House’s rejects possess powers far over the rest.”

Maizel leaned his back against his chair, making an displeased expression.

“Don’t be foolish. When Celes became the queen of that crown prince… just how far will that disgrace go to get in the Walt House’s way? He should be eliminated with all due haste. It seems there are some traitors as well. We shall be tacking on a reason to march on Rhuvenns.”

Beil objected to that.

“Maizel-sama, Celes-sama in Centralle is looking forward to your arrival. You shouldn’t keep her waiting.”

Maizel laughed. His smile was thoroughly filled with self-confidence.

“It’s something to be happy about. My cute daughter is looking

forward to my return. But my pride as a father won't allow me to return to Centralle without a present. Tell Celes I'll be a little late."

Learning there would be no change in Maizel's verdict, Beil replied.

"Your departures to the front lines have increased in number. And as winter sets in, there is a limit to the numbers we can mobilize. If we're moving anyone, it will have to be in the ten thousand units."

Maizel, full of confidence.

"Porter, was it? We have the technology Celes brought back to the Walt House from Arumsaas. Our logistical support is also in order. Have our vassals and their vassals mobilize as well. There are any number of men out there who'd become desperate in longing to see Celes' face of delight!"

In regards to Maizel, Beil gave his opinion.

"Then that would likely fall short of fifty thousand. It is believed a considerable number lie in Rhuvenns. It's even quite a trial to have spies infiltrate them. Why not wait and watch a little longer?"

Maizel stroked his mustache with his fingertip.

"I'm sure he used the Walt House's heirloom. That's all there is to it. But Skills are irrelevant to me. It seems he's grown a bit stuck up, but… that is meaningless before me. I'll have to reclaim the heirloom that thing made off with as well. In itself, it has little value as a gem but it's a precious heirloom, after all. It's all because that dodderer hid it away and gave it to that thing. Good grief, how troublesome it must have been to my father as well."

When Maizel said that, Beil agreed.

"Before Brod-sama passed… Zenoire-sama was the first to go, so perhaps he had lost himself in sorrows."

Once the Seventh, Brod came up, Maizel looked up at the ceiling.

"Seeing that harsh father of mine grow senile was a pitiable sight. When he told me to 'wake up'… I wonder what he was trying to

say.”

After a while of silence between the two, Maizel finally opened his mouth.

“… Hasten the preparations. Even if taking that thing’s head is impossible, I want to deliver Celes news of victory.”

Through thick and thin, there was a difference in Maizel’s treatment of Lyle and Celes…

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“My father? No, um… I-I don’t really remember.”

I gave a vague response, but in all actuality, I had lost a majority of my memory. For that sake, my knowledge on my father Maizel Walt was considerably lacking.

The head of the House that had climbed up to be Bahnseim’s strongest…

And right now, it was mercilessly crushing Celes’ enemies.

Within the Jewel.

The round table between us, I sat across from the Seventh, my grandfather. Maybe the Third didn’t want to be a hindrance, as he had locked himself in his own room of memories.

The Seventh looked a little… no considerably conflicted.

『… Lyle, you’re my grandson, but Maizel is my son. So there are a few things I can say.』

I really didn’t remember my father. In the meager fragments that remained, he truly was kind before my isolation. He had a harshness as well, but the kindness was definitely there.

Thinking of his attitude since my alienation, I could see it well.

『Maizel never regarded the Jewel highly. Do you know why?』

I tilted my head. As I recall, the blue gem became a Jewel after it came into my hands. Even so, the Skills the ancestors left behind all displayed performance you could call extraordinary.

There's no way my father didn't know, so shouldn't he have investigated and found out old Zell had it? If he was up to it, he had any means to search for it.

"Come to think of it, it really is strange. He wasn't particular about heirlooms… also sounds strange. He held great pride in the Walt House."

The Walt House's pride… because of it, he hated his own grandfather, Fiennes the Sixth for sticking his hands into unwholesome trades.

Then why did my father never hold the Jewel?

『Maizel doesn't need the Jewel. No, to be more precise, it has no value greater than an ornament to him. Because Maizel cannot use the Jewel's Skills.』

"Can't use? Did my father have some sort of problem? It didn't look that way to me."

Just like the ancestors, my father was a splendid man… I think. Before Celes twisted things up, he had his heart set on being a good lord to the people.

The Seventh began talking about my father.

『No, he was talented. And it's precisely his talent that made it so Maizel couldn't use the blue gem. Maizel… has a Skill to obstruct the use of Skills. And his own Skill is so strong, he can't even make use of Magic Tools.』

Hearing that, I finally understood why my father wasn't particular about the Jewel.

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… Lorphys' Palace.

With one of the Valkyries stationed in the country before her, Annerinne body stopped just short of sitting in the throne.

"W-what did you just say?"

The other leader were gathered for the audience, and surrounding the maid-clothed Valkyries, they received the report of the unit they sent to Rhuvenns.

"As I was saying, an engagement has been tied between my master's retainer Baldoir Randbergh, and your country's vice-captain of the knights Alette Baillet. It is a splendid result for both countries. Baldoir-sama is my master's close aide. As things are going, there is no doubt of his promotion, and at present, while they are apart in status, that relation will eventually flip over…"

"Not that! Why!? Why did Alette go off and get married without consulting me!? It's only natural to talk to me beforehand, is it not!?"

Those around were saying similar things.

"C-certainly. The vice-captain's marriage was beyond everyone's expectations."
"But it is to our benefit."
"But that shall not change the present situation! Zayin and Galleria and Rusworth are to wed the leading power. What's more, they've sent people of appropriate statue! While this is certainly to our benefit… now if we ask for any more, we'll get opposition from our surroundings!"

The Valkyrie moved her red eyes to take in the surrounding reactions.

From Lorphys' side, the best result would be if Annerinne married Lyle. But that would leave the throne open, so Annerinne would have to stay within the country. If she had a child, they would be the heir. Such a situation was most desirable.

If you wanted to call it selfish, that would be the end of the story, but Lorphys had its own situation. When there wasn't even a marriage tying the forces, there were voices coming out questioning why they were cooperating to such an extent.

Prime Minister Lonbolt shed sweat from his head as he spoke.

"… They won't recognize a marriage with Annerinne-sama? Could you please relay the reason?"

The Valkyrie, disinterestedly.

"Because it is what's best for both sides. And Baldoir-dono is a distant relative to my master. If you express your dissatisfactions, even if master thinks nothing of Lorphys, what of the surroundings?"

Of the Sixth's numerous brothers and sisters, one had married into the Randbergh House. Because of that, Lyle and Baldoir were technically relatives. They had a relation of lord and retainer, and they paid little mind to their blood relation, but from surrounding eyes, denying this marriage would be a problem.

There was a problem with Lyle's side's attitude, but many problems on Lorphys' side as well. Both sides were clattering, and even if they proceeded these talks, they'd only be running themselves into a bog.

Lonbolt spoke to the Valkyrie.

"… We approve of Alette Baillet's marriage. We shall officially send a letter giving our blessings."

The Valkyrie held her skirt in her fingertips, giving a tidy curtsy.

"Much obliged. Gratitude to the depths of your country's generosity."

But Annerinne alone…

“Hold… Hold it right there! Prime Minster, what about my marriage!? You’re the one who said it would be necessary for the country’s sake!”

As she watched the princess act up, the Valkyries passed the message.

(Inform master: bomb disposal complete.)

As the Valkyries treated her as an explosive, Annerinne was carefully removed from the audience chamber by Lonbolt and his associates…

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Night.

In a bedroom of Rhuvenns castle, I sat in a chair, looking at the night sky out the window. The inside of the room should have been warm, but I couldn’t feel any warmth at my core.

Holding the Jewel’s chain in my right hand, I lighted it up, and let the light of the moon shine through the Blue Jewel.

“… Anti-Skill, eh? That’s going to be troublesome.”

A Skill to obstruct Skill Use. To put it simply, my father was easily able to overturn my advantages on the battlefield.

Information relay through Skill. And on top of grasping the surrounding scenery, confirming enemy positions. It was precisely because of their ability elevations through my Skill that a scraped-together force could fight on even footing with an army drilled together. With all of that taken away, It became a difference of base ability.

Even if we had personnel proficient as individuals, looking at the whole, my father's Walt House army was united in will, with higher coordination.

Training, equipment, on top of a difference in experience… thinking over various conditions, not being able to use Skills was a considerably problem. And when the Jewel and Aria's Magic Tool interfered with my Skills and made them unusable, my line with Monica was cut.

I couldn't count on Monica's performance.

"Looking on it like this, I had relied on them quite a bit. If I didn't have the Skills, the current me would…"

As I said something so faint-hearted, the Third called out from the Jewel.

『You sure sound feeble. It's true that it's because of the Skills you were able to fight your way here. But I don't think that's all. In moving a large army, while ability is necessary, there are many other essential factors. If you had the Skills and nothing more, you'd never have been able to make the current situation.』

The Seventh spoke to me.

『That's right. Have more confidence in yourself. It isn't just Skills. It's because you had your power, that you came all the way here.』

I felt a little happy to hear it. Gripping the Jewel in my right hand, I muttered.

"Even so, Skill interference… if I can't use the ancestors' weapons either, it's going to become something troublesome. When we're already quite hard-pressed here."

The soldiers that ran away turned to banditry, and a portion of our members were subjugating them. Their numbers were extremely numerous.

On top of that, a majority of the soldiers we could scrape up from Beim were volunteer soldiers, and had already returned to their

civilian lives. Even if they had all remained, we wouldn't be able to support them, and the four-country alliance soldiers were beginning to return to their homes as well.

The Third thought a bit.

『… I recommend you gather usable soldiers, and urgently prepare a main shaft. Based on the situation, I'm sure soldiers from our side will turn coat.』

Of the many soldiers I took in. Among them, I was going to select out only the trustworthy ones, and make an elite force.

"If I start training them now, how far can we go… and dealing with the enemy once they come…"

The Seventh laughed.

『Lyle, broaden your field of vision. Just normally training the soldiers you can trust… you weren't thinking something as boring as that, were you?』

"Was I not supposed to?"

The Third laughed.

『Goddess, when you've made it this far as an adventurer, why haven't you noticed? At a time like this, there's something quite convenient at your disposal, isn't there?』

On the Third's words, it hit me.

"The Labyrinth! No, but… generally, the technical skills requested from adventurers and soldiers are different."

In truth, that's how the forces of Beim fell. Using adventurers as the main shaft, they had lost to Bahnseim's power of numbers. And they weren't accustomed to fighting humans.

The Seventh spoke.

『But isn't it just right for raising individual prowess while

heightening coordination among smaller platoons? And also. Lyle… Don't you think it's about time to put your constantly-active Skill to use? In the worst case, you need only train the commanders and their aides. Rather…』

The Third took over his explanation.

『Let's say you want to have your own army fight in the Labyrinth. If you want to send in a large quantity of soldiers, and ignore every single bit of adventurer manners, now's the only time.』

As I thought, the Seventh spoke.

『Learning how to communicate between and move forces is also training. Lyle, why don't you try getting others to build up experience and see what happens? If you're on support, they won't experience any large casualties. Have them grow some in a short period of time, and strengthen the army, why don't you? While you're at it, you can supplement your insufficient general pool.』

I decided to abide their opinions.

"Understood. But in the case I take part, I can't really lave this point open."

The Third laughed.

『It's alright. Your Skills have experienced a sudden strengthening with your Growth. Is it because of the Fifth and Milleia-chan? Now let's get some Walt House Style army training underway! It's starting to get fun around here!』

… The only moderately sized Labyrinth around was the one Beim managed. Thinking back, I've never actually entered Beim's Labyrinth before.

A Deep and Quiet Distraction

『Let me say one thing first. No matter how strong the folks you gather together are, if you won't have a commander who can control them, they'll be weak as a group. In contrast, no matter how weak each individual, a good commander can make good use of them.』

As I listened to the Third's words, I drafted up the program. In the office, an empty cup I had placed on the desk in the morning was letting off steam.

This room's air that wouldn't heat up blew away my drowsiness. The Seventh took over from the Third.

『But groups are an interesting thing, you know. Just because the commander's proficient, that doesn't mean he himself is strong. But if he isn't strong, the soldiers won't follow the commander. There are no cowardly soldiers under a superior general is how the saying goes, and it means to say only an unreliable commander would let his man feel unrest… anyways, Lyle, do you get what I'm trying to say?』

Monica took care of my appearance, and after she left to prepare breakfast, I was the only one left in the room.

"It's achievements."

The Third gave a delighted reply.

『That's right. That's just how large a power past achievements hold. You have to raise a commander with achievements their surroundings can recognize. In my case, I only ever experienced small-scale war. So this time you'll have to turn to the Seventh if you need advice on your plan.』

The Seventh sounded a little happy. Unlike the other ancestors, he had commanded troops on an even greater scale, so I'm sure he was confident.

I waited for him to say something but…

『Hmm, I'll say I bluntly… it's practically impossible to raise a commander in an instant.』

… He suddenly denied the whole plan.

"… I don't need those sorts of jokes."

『O-oy! Wait a minute, Lyle! Listen here, when the scale grows, the number of things you have to learn grows alongside it! The group's rules, on top of everything else the people up top have to… you can't think of someone who can command tens as the same type that can command thousands!』

"Oh? But aren't the basics the same?"

I felt the room grow warmer, as I leaned my back into the chair.

『The foundation is just the foundation. But you have an overwhelming lack of time. You don't have the leisure to let them grow. So just take some leaders who already command a considerable scale into the Labyrinth. Within the Labyrinth, your role is nothing beyond support. Give orders but have each squadron send out messengers to communicate. Let them experience the Walt House way in the Labyrinth, and have their bodies remember it.』

If I was to keep at nothing but support in the Labyrinth, then I'd be having them fight without support from my Skills as well.

I brought my right hand to my mouth.

"If I do all that, how much will it raise my chances of victory?"

The Third spoke in an aloof tone.

『Who knows? But if you don't you're setting yourself up for loss. Because you're Skill specialized. Maizel is the opposite, the type who achieves victory on his base strength alone. What's more, the enemy is used to not using Skills, or rather… it will be quite a disadvantageous situation.』

The Seventh had his misgivings.

『There's also the Walt House history we've piled up. The soldiers will fight in the style dyed deeply in their bodies. On top of that, it's an army specialized to Maizel's way of fighting… Unless you borrow some plumes, you'll definitely be pushed back.』

So if we don't train in the Labyrinth, we won't be able to put up a decent fight.

"… I'll leave Baldoir behind, and take General Blois alone."

Perhaps the two thought so as well. The Third put out some more conditions.

『I'm sure it'll be a nice opportunity to talk about this and that. And there's no guarantee everyone you bring along will gain something. In the worst case, around ten to twenty percent will succeed. There's no helping if it's nothing more than having entered the Labyrinth for the rest.』

The Seventh, in regards to that opinion.

『You just need to give them a clear goal. Just set a base level for them to meet, and say anyone who accomplishes the goal in the Labyrinth will get a promotion. Ask not knight or soldier, just send them at it. Not as individuals, if you evaluate them as a group, they'll become quite cooperative.』

The Third, on that.

『Not as individuals, why not have the platoons compete? Yeah, that sounds nice. Prepare a few people to command smaller units, and have them contest amongst themselves. Yeah, that'll be interesting. That'll bring our ridiculous disadvantage back down to just a plain old disadvantage.』

Whichever the case, it didn't change that I was at a disadvantage, apparently.

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… While Lyle was busy preparing to head for the Labyrinth.

Novem was within Rhuvenns' territory. Where the group sent out to develop villages and maintain the area was camping out… she beckoned her guest towards a certain tent.

Originally, the gnome Innis should have been in South Beim, but she had tagged along with the supply convoy, and come to see Novem.

"I never thought you would come to see me. Because we hired Rauno-san for a separate request."

Within the tent, Novem seated Innis and prepared a drink. There were numerous problems on Rhuvenns' territory. Magic specialist Novem headed the force, hastening revival efforts.

To move an army, the time for the march would multiply if the roads weren't maintained. They also had to secure places for them to rest. For that sake, Novem led the engineers.

Innis took the drink from Novem.

"They were training the transport forces in South Beim, so I tagged along with them. I was worrying over who to ask, but… as I thought, you're the person for the job, Novem-san."

Novem sat in a chair, her expression unchanging as she looked at Innis. While she was smiling, Innis felt dread in her heart. Not out of fear. When she looked at Novem, she couldn't help but feel relieved.

(Being liked by another without any reason… I can't think she has that sort of Skill.)

Innis' Skill 【Information】 was one that allowed her to use whatever information she had on hand to perform a prediction of the future. It had a high accuracy, and there were numerous times

when Rauno found himself relying on that Skill.

As a result of using it, Innis' request… no, in order to make Rauno a knight, she had determined Novem's assistance would be necessary.

Of the numerous women close to Lyle, she had chosen Novem.

As Novem smiled, Innis spoke.

"Um… It's about Rauno-san. Rauno-san is a former knight and… he was a knight of Cartaffs. He was charged with all the dirty work, and in the end was driven out of the country…"

Innis thought over what else to add, but in front of Novem, her words suddenly wouldn't come out. No, she was exhibiting a violent resistance to lying.

"I see. I did think there was something somewhat off about his conduct as an information dealer. So that's how it is. And so… what are you asking of me, Innis-san?"

When Innis looked at Novem, she could no longer take her eyes off.

"U-um… please make Rauno-san a knight! While he keeps saying he doesn't mind it, he still has some regret left over, and he sometimes grumbles about it… so for Rauno-san… I want you to act as a mediator with Lyle-sama!"

After taking a sip of drink, Novem continued smiling as she spoke to Innis.

"Do you understand what that means? Let's just say I listen to your request, and mediate with Lyle-sama. Some troublesome folk will come to me thinking anything will be possible if they bring it up with me. And there are other women around Lyle-sama. There's also a possibility people will gather wary of my actions."

… Meaning Novem didn't want to collapse the current balance. Innis understood that. And that's precisely why she relied on Novem.

"Just the fact I came to meet you here will create rumors."

“I’m sure. But I shan’t mediate. If Lyle-sama deems it necessary, I’ll actualize it. That’s all.”

To Novem’s unchanging expression…

“I have a Skill. It’s a special Skill, and it’s one that doesn’t develop to further stages. It has no aptitude for battle. But my Skill will prove extremely troublesome.”

Novem extinguished her smile, going expressionless. Innis broke into a cold sweat as she spoke on.

“Information. A skill similar to future divination. To use it, all I have to…”

Simply upon hearing the Skill name, Novem made an immediate decision.

“Very well. If you’ll use that Skill for Lyle-sama’s sake, then I shall take responsibility and actualize the matter with Rauno-san.”

Her attitude was as if she knew all about her Skill. And once Novem stood, she brought her lips to Innis’ ear.

“As long as you use that Skill for Lyle-sama’s sake, I will offer you shelter. But even if you wish to use it for other purposes, know that the right to decide lies with me. In exchange, I promise Rauno-san will receive a suitable status.”

As if Innis had been grasped by a giant invisible something. Her body wouldn’t move at all. She felt fear, but even so, she desperately brought her head to nod a number of times.

Seeing Innis like that, Novem backed away a bit. And by that on her release, Innis’ remembered how to breathe, rough as her breath became.

“… You definitely cannot tell of your Skill to another. It’s troublesome when used for misdeeds, but more than that, you’ll become a target of assassination. Innis-san, accompany me to Rhuvenns castle. And…”

Innis looked at Novem's face. She looked a little worried.

"… Don't do something like this again. Rauno-san is talented. Even if you didn't speak up, Lyle-sama would have took him in."

Innis spoke to Novem.

"But he specializes in jobs you can't make public, right? I won't say that's wrong. I think it's good as long as Rauno-san makes the best of his Skill. But for him to do such work in his standing… and without anyone behind him…"

Novem understood what Innis wanted to say, and didn't say any further…

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… Arriving at Rhuvenns castle, Novem brought Innis to Lyle's room.

She chose a route with as little pedestrian traffic as possible, but naturally as it was, getting to Lyle would mean you'd encounter guards. The Valkyries on top of knights and soldiers. And there were many civil officers racing hurriedly around the palace.

To top it all off, she had met a troublesome foe.

The one Novem and Innis encountered was Lianne.

"Oh my, how rare. You're Innis the gnome, right? I thought you were in South Beim, you know?"

She knew of Innis, and as a matter of course, it seems she had investigated her ties to Rauno.

Surely Lianne was gathering information on those around Lyle as well.

"… She requested a meeting with Lyle-sama, so I guided her to the castle."

After Novem said that much, Lianne seemed to understand. She looked a little disappointed.

"Is that so. In that case, that means Rauno-san's also joining Novem-san's… how unfortunate. He was a talented one. If it wasn't so busy, I'd have been able to meet him directly."

She had likely thought to take him in. Innis didn't know what to say… it was troubleing for her to make such an expression.

Seeing Innis like that, Lianne let out a light laugh.

"If anything happens, you can count on me, Innis-san."

Saying that, Lianne parted from Novem. While knowing Rauno had come under Novem's umbrella, she stated she would take them in if something unfortunate happened. To Novem.

Novem looked at her back as she walked off.

(She truly is a proficient one. But if I leave Innis-san by her side, it will become something troublesome.)

Lianne was aiming for the legal wife seat. There were actually quite a few who weren't gunning for it, but the ones quite blatantly going for it were Lianne and Ludmilla. Miranda had taken a step back, but if the slightest gap was opened, she'd come and snatch it away.

While they weren't thinking too deeply into it, Gracia and Elza were the same. With such an increase in personnel, maintaining the balance had become an exceedingly difficult thing to do. If she unskillfully let them gather around him, it would end up dragging Lyle's feet.

Keep it to a bare minimum, everyone was wary of it. Lianne had seen Novem taking Innis along, but she wouldn't get any more involved.

(… Lorphys' princess. It's a huge help we were able to prevent a

marriage to that one. I wasn't in the palace, so I was worried on how it would turn out.)

It was rare to find Lyle moved by emotions. But thinking of the ties between countries, it was quite thinkable he would give in.

(No, the ancestors in his Jewel would…)

Once she had thought that far, Innis called over to her. By the time she noticed it, Lianne could no longer be seen.

"Um, Novem-san?"

"… My apologies. Now let's go meet Lyle-sama."

Novem walked off. And she thought…

(I can't let such a thing bother Lyle-sama. Now then, what shall I do…)

Lyle the Fortunate

In the court of Rhuvenns castle, I spoke with General Blois.

It was a meeting about our challenging of the Labyrinth.

“Beim’s Labyrinth at this point in time? What’s more, platoon heads and higher… well, I do think it’s necessary. Beim’s army is one thing, but your army is severely lacking in mid-class commanders, after all.”

Holding a bundle of papers, General Blois had his adjutant by his side. On the other hand, I had Valkyries standing on both sides.

“Our lack of commanders is something terrible. I need to do whatever it takes to get some together in a short period of time. Knight or soldier regardless. I think I’ll give a reward and promotion to whoever does well.”

On my words, perhaps the general understood, as he scratched his hair with his left hand.

“So you’ll have them compete. I do hope all goes well. There are plenty of people in the world who think of dragging other people down. Some caution is required in healthy competition.”

Hearing General Blois’ words, the Third spoke to me.

『Alright, if he already understands that much then leave this matter to him. He’s a person who stands above others by nature. Leave various tasks to him and you’ll be able to prioritize your own work.』

The Seventh sounded delighted.

『It sure is nice to have someone you can push work onto.』

As I said what I’d wanted to, I pat the good general on the shoulder.

“Then I’ll leave it to you, general .You can work out the specifics.”

There, General Blois turned his eyes from his documents to me.

“… Eh? Um, I have quite a bit of other work I have to do.”

At that moment, Novem appeared in the court.

“Lyle-sama, do you have a moment?”

“What’s wrong? It’s a bit early for your return.”

General Blois looked like he wanted to say something, but I approached Novem. Behind her was a small, short girl… Innis-san. While I thought it was a strange pairing, Novem said she wished to speak in a room with no one else.

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As we moved to the palace’s office, I heard from Novem about Innis-san’s skill.

The Third in the Jewel raised a voice of surprise.

『That’s a shocker. Information? For such a convenient Skill to exist.』

The Seventh was also surprised, but he seemed a bit more worked up.

『If we have a Skill like that… Lyle!』

I understood what they wanted to say. Innis-san’s Skill… Information was one that could perform a prediction of the future if you fed it information. If I had that Skill on my side, I had nothing left to fear.

I decided to ask about the urgent and pressing matter at hand.

Novem told me Innis-san’s request.

“In exchange for her cooperation, Innis-san has requested a better treatement of Rauno-san. Lyle-sama, if you appoint Rauno-san as a knight, and promise further…”

“… Before all that, there’s something I have to ask.”

Novem closed her mouth. Innis-san corrected her posture as she sat on the office’s sofa. She looked nervous as she waited for what I was to say.

The Third let out a serious voice.

『That’s right. There’s something we need to ask no matter what at this stage. But we also need to discern the Skill’s accuracy.』

The Seventh was serious as well.

『First let’s give her information, and try a few experiments. By the result, we may have to tune the length of time we spend in the Labyrinth.』

I looked at Innis-san.

“… The truth is, I’m troubled by women problems. I’d like you to look into how I can resolve them.”

Seriously… I posed her the question in extreme seriousness.

After a little space of silence…

“… Eh?”

I heard blank voices from the Jewel as well. The Third sounded let down

『Eh? That one? That’s what you’re going to ask? Lyle, I think you’re a little mistaken here.』

The one mildly angered was the Seventh.

『Lyle, now’s not the time for jokes. Isn’t there something else you should be asking?』

I made him angry, but if you'll let me have my say, my women problems were what required the greatest urgency. An environment where problems would come out if I went further with anyone. These grating human relations. I had nothing but anxiety for my future.

Novem sounded a little trouble.

"Lyle-sama, a question like that is a bit…"

No matter how much cooperation she promised, Innis wasn't a person to whom I should divulge our internal problems so easily. I know that, Novem. But at the moment, I wanted to do something about this field.

"I'm sorry, but this is also a matter that demands the utmost urgency. I'm serious here! I believed in Baldoir, but he plainly knew women. My only comrades are Damien and Maksim-san… and yet I don't have anyone around me I can consult about my women problems!"

Baldoir was fed up with my female relations, or rather, there were too many he was actually wondering how they managed at all.

Damien sought quality over quantity, and didn't understand my worries.

Maksim-san… was put on guard whenever I approached Adele-san. He didn't even trust me.

Innis-san sighed.

"Um, were you listening to what Novem-san was saying? If I don't have a level of information, the accuracy of my predictions is low. Even if you ask me that all of a sudden, I'm unable to answer."

I made a smile.

"That's alright. I'll offer the information. Ask anything you want."

Innis-san looked between Novem's face and mine. Novem sighed and moved to leave the room.

“I’m sure it will be difficult to speak while I’m here, so I’ll be outside.”

As Novem left the room, I began filling Innis-san with all the necessary information.

With this… I won’t have to be troubled by women anymore!

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“It’s just as I thought.”

As I sat on the sofa, I continued passing questions to Innis-san in her Skill-induced state. But I no longer held my hopes and expectations from before.

Regretful… repentant feelings.

The reason being, the result brought by giving the girl information and activating her Skill… it gave a single answer.

“There is no possible way for me to live in peace,” is how it was. So in the end, I decided to reflect and search for a resolution that led to the least amount of casualties.

“… What will happen if I make Ludmilla-san the legal wife?”

Innis-san let off a faint light in the room, speaking in a bit of a calm tone.

“The moment you announce the legal wife verdict, Faunbeux will likely offer a harsh objection. Lianne Faunbeux will begin moving various things behind the scenes. Cartaffs is the second largest country to Bahnseim, but after Faunbeux recovers its landmass postwar as promised, it will lose its unchallenged national power. With intense resistance, there is a high possibility it will all degenerate to two factions.”

I sat cradling my knees on the sofa. Letting out a sigh, next…

“Then who can I choose for things to go well?”

Innis-san’s answer…

“To speak from conclusions, there will be problems no matter who you choose. On the contrary, the ones who you should not choose by any means are the demi-humans Eva, May and Monica. There will be problems in succession, and none of the three desire that status.”

Eva and May aside, I made a dubious expression when Monica’s name came out.

“Well, I agree those three are out. Then how about Aria or Clara?”

“… If you lay the groundwork, the others will accept them as legal wife. However, there is a high possibility one of them shall be made into a blatant puppet. Aria Lockwarde, Clara Bulmer, even if the individuals are able to support Lyle Walt, it is foreseeable that problems will come out with them as empress of the empire.”

I held their images in my mind as I went on.

“Well, I guess it would be a bit hard for them to probe each other. But that side without ulterior motives is looking more appealing by the second.”

The Third sounded a little disappointed.

『That’s right. It’s best if Clara-chan supports Lyle from behind. Hah, I had always imagined them together, reading through books in a giant library.』

The Seventh spoke.

『It’s a problem if you can’t choose Ludmilla or Lianne. In that case, as you suppress the factions, won’t a puppet, or rather public empress be necessary? Or perhaps, if a third faction exists…』

Miranda’s face came up.

“Then what about Miranda!?”

“It is thought that she will be able to suppress the two greater factions, and exhibit ample prowess as an empress… However…”

“However?”

When it sounded nice part-way through, Innis-san dropped the bomb.

“In order to strengthen her own faction, there is a high probability she will increase the number of mistresses. Between Gracia Galleria and Elza Rusworth, she will try to take one of them into her faction, but that won’t be the end of it.”

“Eh? She can’t take them both? They used to get along well.”

Gracia and Elza had been exchanging letters between each other. And yet, at this point, they certainly did have a dubious relation.

“… It will be difficult to put the two of them into the same faction. On the contrary, if you make one of them the empress, there is a high probability the other one will start up their own faction.”

From the Jewel, I could hear the Third’s voice.

『Now this is getting messy.』

“Why did it come to this? Is there no peaceful option?”

Innis-san spoke disinterestedly in regards to me.

“Everyone possesses considerable ability. If any one of them got serious, they have enough talent to set various things in motion. I must ask the contrary. Why did you ever think this would end peacefully?”

I ignored Innis-san’s question, and moved onto my next one.

“Then what about Vera!?”

She was a merchant daughter, but despite this and that, she had

quite a kind side to her. Could this be a surprisingly good selection? As I was thinking that…

“Vera Trēs is the daughter of a merchant. Regardless the wishes of the person in question, it can’t be helped that in a continent where noble blood is highly valued, it will be considered a poor move universally. It is foreseen that the individual will try to take those sorts of troubles onto herself, ending up in tatters in the end. When that happens, her father Fidel Trēs shall use all means at his disposal to get revenge on…”

“Really sorry. No good after all. Yep, I don’t want to see her in tatters.”

I didn’t want to have her push herself to not show her troubles on the surface and take it all in. Innis-san continued.

“Good or bad irrelevant, making an empress of a Merchant Daughter will increase the power of Beim you sought to chip away. Merchant power all across the continent will increase… alongside that, the status of knights will fall, and the number of mercenaries is expected to rise. Even if you succeed in conquering the continent, it is expected that the empire’s glory will cease in just a few generations.”

It would increase the power of money, and make paupers of knights, said Innis-san. Because of that, the feudal lords will turn to hired swords… mercenaries, and there will be a worsening of public order, she said.

The Seventh spoke with all his might.

『… Lyle, you have to give up on Vera. It’ll get even worse than it is now. Well, even if the girl is decent, the greedier merchants will use her name to do whatever they please is how it is.』

When she was such a nice girl, what a terrible future. For her sake, I concluded that I would never be able to give her the legal wife status.

The Third spoke.

『In that case, that leaves Shannon-chan. Well I'll be, there's no way that one will work out.』

"… What if I just settle for the worst one, Shannon?"

There, Innis spoke.

"Shannon Circry, is it? In the case she becomes empress, you will earn her sister Miranda Circry's support. If you can hide her handicap of being blind, she has enough ability to make it as an empress. With her Demon Eyes… Ludmilla Cartaffs and Lianne Faunbeux will be wary of her seeing through their plights, and the faction wars will likely quiet down."

The Seventh spoke.

『What's this!? That was the most favorable response we've heard all day!』

The Third seemed surprised.

『How unexpected, for that uselessly cute girl to actually be so skilled…』

I tried asking the last one.

"Then what about Novem?"

But in regards to that, Innis-san spoke.

"… There is too little information to conduct a predictions. At the current stage, prediction is impossible. However."

… However.

"… At the current stage, there is a high probability that Lyle Walt and Novem Forxus will be unhappy."

She said.

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A few days later.

Arriving in Beim, in the middle of reconstruction, I led an army of five thousand. I left Baldoir behind to defend Rhuvenns, and starting with Novem, I left Aria and Miranda as well.

No matter what happened, we wouldn't lose at once.

The surrounding rubble had been removed, and nothing had yet to be done to the places that weren't in use. The inner wall made of ages passed was now enough to contain all of North Beim.

The largely shrunken Beim didn't have its past prosperity. But it was moving towards reconstruction, and with the results in sight, smiles were returning to the peoples' faces.

There were soup kitchens run out of the intact buildings, supplying food to the refugees and those that had lost their place to live.

Entering such a city, Beim's residents took some distance from us.

Riding a horse, General Blois awkwardly scratched his hair.

"Good grief, you sure are hated."

Without changing my expression.

"Well, it's the first time something like this ever happened to Beim. From an outsider's point of view, it was inevitable, though."

The discontentments of the four-nation alliance towards the city were especially large. Zayin and Lorphys had suffered heavy casualties because of Beim.

For those who experienced Beim fan their flames and send in mercenaries to devastate their lands, it was natural retribution.

"This'll leave some marks. If all goes poorly, once they're done with their rebuilding, there's a possibility they might proclaim their independence."

I answered to General Blois' anxiety.

"Beim's a commercial city. I'll permit it to have an extent of authority. But not more than an extent. I'll prepare different people to manage the surrounding land."

On those words, the general rubbed his chin.

"… You split Beim in two, and held down their surroundings. With this, Beim's only means of obtaining food will be to buy it. When did you think of such a thing? No, since when were you considering it?"

I laughed a bit. From the moment we arrived in Beim, the ancestors in the Jewel were instantly put on guard by its assets and authority. If I had to say, we thought to chip at their assets from the moment we got here.

With my slight laugh, perhaps General Blois sensed something, as he didn't continue his line of questioning. But he did make a comment.

"What a scary person."

I offered my take.

"I've still got a long way to go."

… Was all I could say.

Natural Enemy of Labyrinths

North Beim.

If you said the word Beim some time ago, it would only indicate what was now North Beim. But right now, it was the ruins of where a city stood, of piles of removed rubble, and continued reconstruction.

The one waiting for me in such a city was Adele-san with bags under her eyes. Maksim-san accompanied her, and to welcome me into the city of North Beim…

"… When I thought you'd finally distributed men to help in the reconstruction, you're going off to the Labyrinth, eh? No, it's nothing. You're as free as ever, I see. I do hope it leads to something good in the end! But… please send some hands over here. Like Clara. Or that straight-laced Clara. Or Clara. Or maybe even Monica-san would be fine."

… I really couldn't. No, perhaps she was aware of that. But her stress building up by the day was being strongly directed against me.

Maksim-san gave a shrug of his shoulders.

"Sorry. Adele-sama is reaching her limit. If possible, it would be a huge help if you could send some help over here."

Hearing that, I looked at Adele-san and Maksim-san.

"… No, as long as you rotate and circulate work around the people currently stationed here, shouldn't it work out? Why can't you get yourself some moderate rest?"

As I said that, Adele-san…

"I want to rest! But! But… day after day, complaints calling themselves requests come directly addressed to me. What's more, no matter what I lay hands on they complain! They complain, I tell you1"

Watching her on the verge of tears was General Blois standing beside me. He seemed a little perplexed.

“Well, we have to get in some urgent reorganization and training, and if Rhuvenns is breached, reconstruction would be the least of our problems.”

To be blunt, we didn’t have the leisure to send anyone. Rather, while it’s true Beim had come under my protection… Adele-san’s people were pushing themselves too far.

“No, just complete the work in moderation. The way you’re doing things clearly seems to be impossible. If you don’t want to be negligent, you’ll need some moderate rest.”

The Third in the Jewel spoke in a gentle voice.

『Ah, it’s that. Adele-chan is a kind girl. Or maybe too earnest. Reconstruction is a story of a decade, maybe even two, so she should really learn to take it in stride. If she presses everything too hard like that, she’ll collapse.』

What I learned upon coming to the site was that she was trying too hard. The supplies were prepared, and she was doing what needed to be done. Even I wouldn’t be able to process any additional requests.

In truth, if we allotted everything towards Beim’s revival, we would definitely lose against Bahnseim. More than that, that I even left them Adele-san was an act of kindness.

“Reconstruction won’t end in a few years. We have ten, or twenty years in our field of vision. So exert yourself in moderation. Without any negligence. That’s how it is, so Maksim-san… force Adele-san to get some rest. Ah, you can take a day off with her.”

Learning she should have rested, Adele dropped her shoulders. And from her knees, her entire body dropped as well.

“N-no way… so it would’ve been better off if I rested…”

No, go get some sleep already. It’ll be nothing but trouble if the top

collapses. It will be impossible to resolve everything in a short period of time.

Maksim-san put an arm around her shoulders, and led her off. I exchanged a look with General Blois. There, the general…

“Ah, youth. Earnest and full of a sense of responsibility. That child’s the adjutant type. But if you put her at the top, she’s the archetype where the ones below her don’t grow.”

It seems she was the type that wouldn’t delegate enough work to those below her. I had received that sort of warning in the past before. Come to think of it… I was cautioned on that in the Labyrinth. Arumsaas’ Labyrinth, and awkward as we were, I was given the objective of breaching the thirtieth floor…

“She’ll just have to learn from now on. She’s a valuable civil officer. I’ll have to let her get in some experience and learn from it.”

General Blois laughed.

“It’s truly a good thing when you have a lot of people capable of working. Makes our lives a lot easier.”

The Seventh mumbled.

『This guy’s the typical commander type. The troublesome type that grows lax after delegating work to others.』

I removed my gaze from General Blois, and focused on the entrance to Beim’s Labyrinth. It was the entrance of a cave that proceeded downwards. The area around it was in order, and it was regulated by a gate.

In the past, it had many guards and people passing in and out, I’m sure there were plenty of food stalls and bazaars around… I could see the vestiges. At this point, a few stands had restarted their business.

“… Now then, shall we be off?”

Blois nodded. I had passed all the specific jobs onto him, and he

had passed it onto his subordinates… and that's how all the preparations were done. Now all that's left is to see the results we can drag out.

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… Rhuvenns castle.

Novem had stationed guards for Innis. At the same time, she had left a message to the Valkyries in South Beim. With the Network the Valkyries held, it was possible for information exchange without taking any time.

That Innis was in Rhuvenns. And Rauno was done with his work, she told him to come to Rhuvenns as well.

Novem was busy in various ways, and in order to reunite with the engineer squadron she had left at the site, she had to depart from the castle.

As she prepared to set off alongside her guards, a person called over to her.

"If it isn't Novem-dono. You look busy."

Turning towards the voice, she looked at the individual walking towards her. Making a smile.

"It is a pleasure, Count Bagdia. What business do you bring?"

Count Bagdia. 【Raebel Bagdia】 was a Bahnseimian feudal noble in his early twenties. He had only just taken over his house, and the invasion of Beim had been his first large-scale war.

Losing to Lyle, he became a prisoner of war, and after promising his cooperation, his standing was one where he'd lead forces under Rauno or Baldoir.

However… the man was still young, scorning Lyle who was even younger than he.

“It only intrigued me a little. Our leader has made for the Labyrinth, leaving such beautiful women to do his work. Would that not be a problem to his standing as leader?”

His tone was gentle. And his words were sound. True enough, thinking of Lyle’s standing, he didn’t have the leisure to head off to the Labyrinth.

While he did it because it was necessary, how his surroundings saw it was a different problem. Novem answered with a smile.

“… It is necessary for the coming battle, so Lyle-sama merely put it to action. If you have any dissatisfactions, why not bring it up with him directly?”

Raebel touched his green bangs with his fingertip as he spoke.

“A newcomer such as I haven’t the right to say so much. I only thought I’d hear out the opinions of his female camp. The nobles of Bahnseim look down on adventurers. Yet now they’ve fallen to mere adventurers and are doing the same… oh, I’m just voicing the majority opinion here, you know? I have no part in it.”

The nobles of Bahnseim wouldn’t help but look down on adventurers. Former-noble adventurers, from their points of view were targets of disdain. That tendency grew stronger the higher you went up.

“Lyle-dono was driven out of his house, fell to adventurerhood and climbed up from there. I’ll evaluate him for that. However… with his current statue, is it really alright for him to continue fighting as an adventurer would?”

He lifted Lyle up as he criticized. Novem spoke.

“So a fair and upfront battle. I see, that’s important and knightly. Next I meet him, I’ll be sure to bring it up. Of course, those important sort of talks should be kept to the important sort of meetings.”

Raebel smiled.

“Yes, I’ll be careful. I haven’t yet grasped my standing, so please forgive me.”

Saying that, leading his following knights along, Raebel walked off. Novem watched his back expressionlessly…

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… Lianne’s office.

Outside, the ramparts, and the castle town under repair could be seen.

There were few people who’d made the move over here, but even so, from the lodging houses the soldiers lived, a sort of liveliness was coming out.

Looking on the scene, Lianne took a glimpse at the figure reflected in the window glass. There was one maid-uniformed Valkyrie in the room. And at the door, a green-haired, blue eyed youth… Raebel stood.

He had status as a count, with adequately splendid clothing over his body. Lianne didn’t turn around.

“… I see, so Novem-san has made some suspicious movements. And you came all the way here to tell me that?”

Raebel spoke. His attitude was soft, his tone as if he was worried. But Lianne felt something stuck on the side of his words.

“Yes. I don’t really like doing this sort of thing, but I thought it best to tell you. You have an engagement tied with our leader. Personally, I think you a much more worthy existence for him than that daughter of the Forxuz House.”

Lianne raised the corners of her lips, turning ever-so-slightly.

“Oh my, are you sure you should be saying such a thing?”

“My standing isn’t clear. And I do think you’re worthy the status of empress, Lianne-sama. Coming all the way to Rhuvenns from the soil of Faunbeux, and your form supporting our leader will surely make many lower their heads…”

“… Though in the past, the one who betrayed me was a crown prince of your country. I hate roundabout talks. Say your business.”

Clearing his throat at his words interrupted part-way through, Raebel opened his mouth again.

“I’m sure General Blois would accept it. And retainer Baldoir was formerly a knight of the Walt House. I’m sure he has some to think over, but he’ll approve. But when it comes to the knights like us you pick up on the way, a pure meritocracy will come into question. There will be many to hold dissatisfactions.”

“Is that so,” Lianne muttered, turning her whole body towards Raebel, heading to her desk, and taking a seat.

“We believe our leader may have scorn for us knights. Despite being born to a high house, his failure to understand may be reason enough for his exile… oh, this is only rumor, mind you.”

“Yes, I’m aware… but it would be troublesome if you went and made rumor of such a thing. Count Bagdia, will you continue to report to me?”

Raebel gave a delighted smile, touching his right hand to his chest.

“Yes, with pleasure.”

Lianne looked over Raebel with a smile…

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… A corridor in Rhuvenns castle.

One of Raebel's tag-along knights spoke to him as they walked. In a small voice, they held a conversation that could be taken either way as they moved.

"Raebel-dono, who are you really aiming for?"

On the elder knight's question, Raebel laughed a bit.

"Really aiming for, eh? To be completely honest, I'm not. Women problems are easy to get muddled. And once they start to crumble, the rest will just work itself out."

The other knight laughed. His smile was miles away from refreshing.

"We're counting on you. From our point of view, we'll need some insurance we'll be fine no matter which side falls. Even so, heading to the Labyrinth at this point in time is…"

"… Whoops, don't say any more."

After silencing the knight, Raebel laughed a bit. And looking around, he found there was no one.

"Sorry."

"No, everyone can build up frustration. If you've got underemployed placed under you, even more so. Well, it's just a little easier to move around while he's away."

As Raebel said that, he walked to the front, and smiled a bit…

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Beim's underground Labyrinth.

On its fifteenth lower level, we were camped out in a large room. There were guard knights around, as well as Valkyrie Unit One fully equipped on standby.

On the board General Blois watched, Valkyrie Unit Two kept moving pieces about. Seeing them, the general touched a hand to his chin and nodded.

"… No wonder we lost. From the start, the accuracy and sheer amount of information we had was too far apart."

My trumpcard that struck down the armies invading Beim… seeing it, General Blois offered a line about my Skill.

"In a sense, it's the strongest there is."

But there was something I had to add.

"That strongest Skill can't be used in the next battle. While we can, we need to drill sending messages and relaying precise order into their bodies."

In that large room, a messenger raced in.

"Message! The second company took an attack from monsters, and cannot advance. They request reinforcements!"

On that messenger, General Blois looked at me, so I nodded.

There, Blois…

"We'll send the reserves of the third company as reinforcements. Until then, focus on defense, and block them. When the reinforcements arrive, step down. Messenger, relay that message to the third company. The passage is…"

The runner heard those orders, and another messenger in the room went to convey the message to the third company.

Unit Two moved the pieces on the map, and indicated the second company gradually being pushed back. I looked at it, mindful that I should only open my mouth when it really got dangerous.

“The second company sure is frail.”

Perhaps General Blois knew they were weaker compared to the others from the start, as he nodded and explained.

“They have a lot of talented personnel, but perhaps I should say their gears don’t mesh. If they learn to work together, I think they will perform spectacularly as a unit.”

If that’s what the general thought as he formed them, I’m sure I shouldn’t open my mouth on it.

“I’ll count on it. But if that doesn’t work out, please think of another means. Splitting them up or losing them is something I’d like to avoid.”

General Blois nodded.

“They’ll put out results. Now then, the situation’s changing again… a portion of third company has gotten lost.”

The pieces Unit Two moved reproduced a unit of the third company getting lost in the Labyrinth.

The Seventh in the Jewel sounded a little fed-up.

『… To not even be able to follow a line. Their drilling is way too low.』

The Third gave out a large laugh.

『A talented group that doesn’t mesh. A group of the lost. You’ve got some problem children here. Yep, yep! It’s because these sorts of things never go as you expect that they’re so interesting.』

General Blois held a hand to his forehead.

“… Call them back.”

Without saying anything particular, I watched the pieces move across the map. Unit Two was only reproducing what I was seeing, as we thought over what to do next.

“If we can’t send orders at once, I guess it’s best we change our approach.”

If I used Skills, I could immediately send the third company, and have them meet up with the second one before they were pressed into a hard battle. But the messenger only brought the information once they had already run into trouble. What’s more, time had already passed since then.

“… Starting tomorrow, I think we’ll be putting away the pieces.”

Our situation where we could constantly obtain the latest information would disappear, so I decided to train for what was to come. Unit Two caught my mutterings, looking a little sad that she was out of a job.

Thoughtless

Beim's underground Labyrinth.

Having proceeded to its twentieth level, we secured a supply line with the surface as we spent our days battling monsters.

Using a vast room as our main base, we awaited messengers to come from the surrounding units, giving out orders.

General Blois sat as he spat out a sigh.

"In an environment with enemies coming from all directions, it's quite a hassle to maintain a collective group. And the units venturing to the surface have it rough too. Collecting up monster materials and Magic Stones, bringing them all the way to the surface only to come back with supply replenishments. So all the adventurers were doing something like this?"

Our large scale was the reason for that, and generally a single party would be able to fulfill all roles. It truly was a hassle, but not the sort of hassle General Blois was thinking of.

"Our scale is just too large, and normally, a smaller group would be able to take care of everything. Well, it really depends on the party, though."

Blois looked around.

"I'm also starting to lose my sense of time. And while we're having the injured and post-Growth inflicted rest in a separate room… it really is a hassle. No wonder the adventurers go through so much trouble. They're pretty much specialists for fighting efficiently in a limited space. If we knew, we would've been more wary."

If they did that, I'd have been troubled, but it's true the battlefield they fought on was much too different from the soldiers. To such a camp a messenger raced over.

"Message! The second company has found the floor boss! The passage is shaped like…"

General Blois and I confirmed the memo the messenger brought in. Once we handed it to Valkyrie Unit Two, she copied it down on the map.

I looked at the map.

“With this, our map of the twentieth floor is practically complete.”

Touching a hand to his chin, General Blois gazed at the layout.

“… But even if we’ve completed it, the passageways will change at fixed intervals. Give it a little, and this map will become useless. It feels like such a waste.”

I headed for Unit One.

“I’m going out. I’m sure they’ll be able to defeat it if they surround it, but that would be pushing them too far. Have them rest a little before we set out for the twenty first floor.”

I was pretty much just taking out the bosses for them, but unlike with adventurers, the knights and soldiers generally didn’t consider that to be stealing. More so, they felt I was decreasing their work load?

As I took my Katana in my left hand, Unit One in blue armor let her gold twin tails sway a bit as she nodded. Her appearance was similar to Monica, a large difference being the size of their chests… or rather lack thereof.

Professor Damien said it was wonderful.

“I’ll accompany you.”

General Blois stood from his seat.

“When possible, I’d prefer our leader take along some guards.”

I attached the metal fixtures to hang the scabbard from my hip.

“No need. And if it’s this floor, I’ll be able to manage alone.”

Those around looked tiredly at me, but I'd defeated floor bosses a number of times already, so no one said anything about it.

General Blois sat back down, hiding his face with a hand.

"Well I'm sure you can. But we have to maintain things, and it feels as if you're calling us unreliable."

I thought a bit, but for now, it was better off without people around me.

"… I'll do that starting next time. Let's go."

As I took Unit One along out of the room, I touched the Jewel. The Third looked at the surrounding knights and soldiers.

『Well, I'm sure it's no fun. But you should keep your trumpcards hidden to the end. You still don't know who's friend and foe around you after all.』

The Seventh held a similar opinion.

『There are some people whose tongues are prone to slip. For the current Lyle, this floor's boss class monster won't even be a test of power.』

I wanted to conceal the scope of my power as best as I could for now. Against my father who blocked my Skills as well. Thinking of what was to come, it depended on concealing my hand.

As I walked alongside Unit One, I took the shortest route to the room the Boss waited.

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… Count Raebel Bagdia.

Within Rhuvenns castle, he approached all women who had

announced their engagement to Lyle, or those with similar relations.

Even if the female camp outside were impossible, he was easily able to meet Shannon and Lianne working in the castle.

And for Monica working as a maid, if you scoured the corridors a bit, you could find her at once.

Lianne rarely ventured out of her own office. Shannon was put to work helping around the castle, and it was relatively easy to find where she was.

The one wary of Raebel as he approached the female camp was Baldoir. Finding Raebel still talking with other knights in the corridor, Baldoir approached.

“Count! What is the meaning of this? At such a busy time, you take part not in training, instead haunting all the castle’s women… why don’t you try avoiding actions that would make some question your fidelity?”

From Baldoir’s point of view, before a leader, Lyle was his lord, and a reliable successor. At present, with the will of his House, he revered the lad as his lord. While Lyle was away, having Raebel make rounds to the women was quite unpleasant.

There, taking two knights along, Raebel shrugged his shoulders.

“Fancy meeting you here, Baldoir-dono. Is that what you thought of me? It saddens me. Even like this, I’m a knight of Bahnseim. What’s more, from a Count House, direct follower of the royal line. It’s unthinkable for my fidelity to be at doubt. And don’t your misgiving imply you trust not our leader’s betrothed as well?”

Baldoir could sense an implicit, ‘when you’re just a retainer of the Walt House,’ embedded into the direct follower part.

“But should we not refrain from misleading conduct? And what reason have you for not taking part in training?”

The reason this scraped-together gather’s fragility stood out was

because it was simply too large in scale.

Now that Lyle and Blois were absent from Rhuvenns Castle, they were beginning to slacken. From the start, Blois was a general of Bahnseim with his subordinates in order, and Lyle had painfully drilled how detestable he was on the battlefield into the heads of Bahnseim.

The two of them had achievements, so the soldiers they took in could only keep silent. But with Baldoir, the other soldiers would grow lax.

Rather than a lack of achievements, he hid in Lyle and the others' shadows, so his merits didn't really stand out. At the same time, his standing was as retainer to the Walt House, so the surrounding nobles saw him as beneath them.

One of Raebel's tag-along knights clicked his tongue.

"Che, when you're just a retainer of the Walt House."

As he said that, a dangerous atmosphere began to build on the spot. Baldoir had his backbone.

"… And you're just the remnants of a fallen army, is what I'd like to say. When you were only let live by Lyle-sama's compassion."

The air only worsened, and the first to reach for his sword was Raebel's follower knight.

But then Monica made her appearance.

"Baldoir-sama, Lianne-sama is calling for you. Make for her office in a timely manner."

When in front of other people, Monica stuck a –sama onto Lianne as well. On her appearance, the four unhanded their hilts.

Raebel spoke in regards to Baldoir.

"We can't be shedding blood before a lady."

His attitude was as if Baldoir was the one trying to cut them down, but Baldoir knew he was at a disadvantage three on one. He thought.

(The blood's gone to my head a bit. I have to keep level-headed.)

As he repented that the hectic days and provocations had chipped away his composure, Monica watched the backs of the parting three. Baldoir looked at her.

"My apologies. I'll head to Lianne-sama at…"

But Monica spoke.

"No, 'twas a lie, so pay it no mind. Though I was told to do so. It does not matter if you leave those men to their devices."

To her words, Baldoir made a serious expression.

"That will cause our discipline to slacken. In truth, their conduct cannot be overlooked, and if things stay this way, by the time Lyle comes back…"

Monica turned her face to Baldoir, expressionless as she spoke.

"There is no problem. It will all be resolved by the time the damn chicken comes back. There will be no problem as long as you carry out your normal duties, Baldoir-dono. And don't do anything too thoughtless. If anything happens, the chicken dickwad will be saddened."

Baldoir could only watch over Monica as she walked off…

"There won't be a problem if we leave them be… it couldn't be…"

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A wide room.

Wider than any of the passages we had walked through, with a high ceiling. The stones embedded in the walls, ceiling and floor glimmered, but they were insufficient, so Valkyrie Unit One had to hold up a lantern.

Against the boss of this large room… the Minotauros, I held my Katana in my right hand as I rushed around.

On top of its body around twice the size of a humans, it was quick on its feet, and it gave of the impression of a solid running wall.

“This one would’ve given us some deaths. Even if I sent them at it, if they don’t solidify their vanguards, the casualties would become something terrible…!”

Catching up to me, the Minotauros lowered its giant raised bludgeon towards the floor. Even crashing into the ground, the club didn’t break, the floor gouged out instead.

But given the time, that floor would restore itself to normal. Even so…

“It looks like it can’t be anything but wood. Is that really a club?”

When I voiced my question, the Minotauros swung its bull head to the side, opening its large mouth. Its saliva was flung as its red eyes looked as if they were glowing.

There were a number of wounds over its body. Wounds I had inflicted.

From the Jewel, I heard the Third’s voice.

『Good thing it’s a tough one. Makes the perfect practice dummy. Now then, Lyle.』

Hearing that, I concentrated myself. Concentrating, I activated a Skill.

“… Warp.”

Unable to avoid its horizontally swung club, I used the Seventh’s

Skill to teleport and position myself behind the beast. I saw sparks scatter as the cudgel grazed the floor, but aiming at the Minotauros' head, I lowered my blade.

"Still too shallow."

An attack right after teleportation. It looked easy, but it was ridiculously hard in practice. The Seventh offered me some advice.

『That was better than before. Keep at it to get the knack. Well, it'll probably still be hard to use it consecutively.』

It was originally the Seventh's Skill. From its owner's eyes, it couldn't be helped that I looked shoddy. For if someone besides its original owner used a Skill, the Mana consumption and even the burden to use it greatly increased.

It already consumed a large quantity of Mana, and it held a large burden. It was originally the exclusive Skill of a single human. It would be stranger if there wasn't a problem with someone else forcibly using it.

From the Minotauros' nape down his back, I was able to cut in a few centimeters, drawing a slightly-diagonal line a meter in length, but my foe showed no signs of falling.

Raising a roar, it spun around, swinging the back of its left hand at me.

I carefully caught it in midair, using my opponent's force to take a large amount of distance.

In the place I was set to land, Unit One circled around to arrive beforehand. She had spread out the wing-like binder on her back, and she would likely protect me if I was rendered immobile.

To her, I…

"Number three doesn't feel right in my hands. I already tested number four, so get me number five."

"Understood."

Opening her binder a little wider, there were a number of Katanas tucked away in it. Among the swords bundled together, she picked out number five and handed it to me.

I handed the one in my hand over, I instantly started moving, drawing the Minotauros' attention, and restarting our game of chase.

The Third paid some mind to my Katana.

『You prepared a few subtly different ones, but is it number five after all? Just looking from here, it looks like its attacks are the sharpest.』

Among the ones I'd used, it's true number five felt right. I had tried testing the others, but there was no doubt five was the best. The sensation when I held it, and the feel when I cut… they all came to me nicely.

"When I get back, I'll have another forged with number five as the base. But before that…"

Turning towards the Minotauros chasing me, I waited for him to attack… and used the Skill Warp to move instantaneously.

As I'd repeated the same thing a number of times, the monster was learning, and it immediately swung its cudgel around backwards.

But…

"Sorry to say, I've already grasped the trick to it."

The encroaching club swiped through empty air. Having moved to a slightly higher point, I fell as I used the sword to draw a line across the Minotauros with its eyes open wide…

Its head twirled through the air.

Landing, when I tried returning the Katana to its sheath…

"Ah, this is the wrong scabbard."

It didn't fit. I called Unit One over, and left the Katana with her. Blood pouring from its neck, the Minotauros' body fell backwards, as the stairs to the next floor manifested at a dead end.

Unit One retrieved the sword from me, carefully wiping the blood off its blade before returning it to its correct scabbard.

"Splendid work, master."

I looked at her face.

"Calling me 'master' with the same face as Monica… it feels really off."

The same face as Monica. But as she wasn't yet capable of expression, she always looked unimpressed. However, a Monica that didn't call me a chicken dickwad… yeah, something was off here.

There, Unit One spoke.

"It would be troublesome if you lumped me together with that pile of junk. If you hate that scrap metal, you could keep me by your side, you know."

While she couldn't show expression, she was still an automaton. The same sort as Monica. I'm sure that whether automatons were broken or not, they'd have this sort of personality.

"Just what were the ancients who made you all thinking when they gave you that personality…"

The mysteries of the ancients only deepened. Well, not that it was relevant to the me of today.

Not knowing is…

The thirty fifth floor.

A few weeks since we came to Beim. The training of the five thousand men who entered the Labyrinth had come to a single large stop.

Our lack of time was one thing, but we weren't able to advance any further. The plan of overwhelming foes with numbers was losing its applicability.

However, we were able to output an extent of results. A number of the small platoons were able to bring out individuals with the ability to lead mid-class forces.

Standard soldier to platoon leader, we were able to find a lot of those talents as well. More than that, that the platoons General Blois had his eyes on were able to exhibit their results was a large contributing factor.

In order to prepare to withdraw, Unit Two was using the pieces on the map to reproduce the movements of the Labyrinth in real time, but…

"… It's amazing. For their momentum to be so different from the others. They'll probably be able to make it fine on the floors beyond."

As I praised them, General Blois sounded delighted.

"I never thought they would be able to put out results to this level. More than that, the lost platoon you were lending an eye to is looking nice as well."

The lost platoon.

When we first challenged the Labyrinth, they were a gathering of problem children who separated from the main body, and found themselves lost. After that, they got lost three more times. All things considered, I thought it best to just dissolve them, but I could never

find the time, so we continued putting them to use.

I did lend an eye to them, but I never thought they'd grow to such an extent.

"How should I put it, their habits are too strong. Like the unit you were paying mind to, when they have strong characteristics, or rather…"

There's also that the platoon was inadvertently a harem platoon, so within my heart, "I want some more comrades who can understand how I feel," or so it's true I held some impure incentives. So I did support them as an individual, but I never thought they'd grow so much.

General Blois shrugged his shoulders.

"All their members have experienced Growth twice. It was beyond our expectations for that platoon to get this far. But their characteristics are so strong, we'll only be able to use them as a raid unit."

Raid unit, how cool, or so I held such a simplistic impression as I watched Unit Two move the pieces across the map.

And folding my arms, I asked General Blois. From my eyes, it would be fine to call this Labyrinth Training a success. We had fulfilled our goal, so there wasn't a problem. But I was curious how the general felt about it.

"By the way, this time's training… how do you evaluate its results? I think it's a success."

There, General Blois put both his hands on the table, supporting up his body, as his gaze didn't shift from the map.

"I don't think it's a failure. But even if you call it a success… we're up against the Walt House army called the strongest in all of Bahnseim. If we wanted to be able to stand up to them, then I'm sure it's a success, but if you have victory in mind, it's insufficient. We've got a unit with momentum, and a unit with an unexpected nature. I do think the overall quality has improved. But what our

enemy has built up is different.”

For some reason, the Seventh in the Jewel sounded happy.

『So he does get it, this kid.』

I sure he was delighted to have the Walt House evaluated highly, but they were our enemies now. I’d like him to think a bit more before speaking.

Unlike the Seventh, the Third thought a little.

『We’re not at an overwhelming disadvantage anymore. Well, it’s a good thing. What’s left is to withdraw, return to Rhuvenns, reorganize, and train some more. From Innis-chan’s predictions and our thoughts, that’s about when Maizel-kun will start to move, but… Seventh, do we have any prospects of victory?』

The Seventh once led the Walt Army. And he had also made a prediction of the timeframe my father would move, confirming its general scale and goal with Innis-san’s predictions.

『… It’s not in Maizel’s personality, but at present, I do not believe he will be able to defeat us and take Rhuvenns back. Sparing that amount of soldiers will be difficult for the Walt House. I’m sure he wouldn’t want some scattered landholdings, and his goal is Lyle’s head… if he’s thinking of getting a present for Celes, then after fighting and burying us, he’ll head straight for Centralle, won’t he?』

According to Innis’ future predictions, using the Seventh’s knowledge and experience, the enemy’s goal… was my head. What’s more, as a present to Celes.

That such a reason was accepted for moving the army was proof of how twisted it had become. But as some cruel joke, twisted as it was, their ability was the real deal.

『There are a number of military formations Maizel specializes in. We’ve prepared the formations to counter them, but… the problem is whether the soldiers will feel unrest on a special battlefield. They can’t use the Skills and Magic Tools they normally depended on.』

For that sake, we had restricted Skill use in this training. But from the Walt House eyes, it was nothing more than putting on a show. Copying what they were trained to do for their military careers.

The Third muttered.

『… If they're coming to take Lyle's head, we can think of abusing that fact to crumble them.』

The Seventh understood his implication.

『Normally, he'd likely avoid chasing the boy too far. But if Celes twisted him… the possibility exists.』

How ironic. That we would be fighting the Walt House army using Celes… having been twisted by the girl, that was becoming the Walt House's weakness. An army with strength and the ability to overcome, Bahnseim's strongest army…

"So the best bait would be me."

Hearing my murmur, General Blois raised his face, so I shook my head, and said I was just talking to myself.

As I stretched on the spot, I became curious as to how things were going in Rhuvenns.

"It'll be paperwork hell once we get back. Hah, I do hope nothing's gone awry on that side."

As I said that, General Blois smiled and agreed.

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… Inside Rhuvenns castle.

An underground escape passage used by the royal line.

It led into a waterway, and there was a group raising a sheet of

spray as they ran through that passageway. With Count Bagdia at the center, the gathering of nobles were running from something.

A few of the knights had prepared magic lights on their left hands, the soldiers constantly looking back as they ran.

Surrounded by guards at the vanguard, Raebel made a panicked expression.

“Don’t screw with me. Don’t screw… I only made a proposal. A simple gathering and they stand to their feet…!?”

The Bahnseimian nobles in Rhuvenns castle. Mainly those who’d surrendered to Lyle had gathered, and while it wasn’t a secret get-together, Raebel had drafted up a banquet. They had held a few drinking bouts beforehand, and he even got permission.

But the banquet hall was suddenly surrounded, and they were about to be apprehended on the suspicious of treachery. Albeit, they had planned to do so, but they were still at a stage where everyone was moving discreetly.

At the present stage, he hadn’t even voiced the word rebellion. He had just gotten those building dissatisfaction together, and was building friendly relations with them.

After that, based on how things went, even if they were taken in by Lyle, he would be able to make a large faction. Defeating Lyle and going independent, or perhaps handing him as a present to Bahnseim. He was at a stage where he was still considering the specifics.

“Count, we should be able to get out. By the escape ways we confirmed beforehand, the exit should already be…”

As the guard knight without any decent weaponry- as he’d been taking part in a party- said that, he collapsed and sprayed water onto Raebel. The guard knight no longer moving, those around turned their lights onto him, revealing a few arrows pierced into his chest and vitals.

Seeing the knight floating in the water, Raebel pulled the sword at

his hip.

The others went in front to protect him. The other guards pointed their swords towards the tunnel's exit. If an arrow had come flying, it could only have come from there.

Without any lights about them, a group wrapped in robes appeared from the depths of the passage. Something lit up at the center. Under the glow of the magic light, Miranda's green hair was revealed.

Her armor on her body, in her right hand, the blades of two daggers were held between her fingers.

"Yes. This way's a dead end. Too bad for you."

Behind the group in black, fully armed knights lay in wait. There were a few dozen of Baldoir's iron pipe corp among them, directing their gunpoints.

Raebel looked at Miranda.

"… Do you understand what you're doing? If you kill me, the other nobles won't keep quiet. And I'm…"

"… Close with Lyle's other betrothed; is that what you wanted to say? What an innocent man. I'm here because they asked me to be. When I was busy all around, it sure was a bother. Well, I'm sure Aria isn't suited for this sort of thing, so the duty naturally goes to me."

As Miranda said that and laughed, a shock raced down Raebel's spine. On top of goosebumps, he was breaking into a cold sweat as he swallowed his breath.

(I have to get through this… looks like breaking through with force is impossible. Then negotiate, and lower their guard…)

His thoughts were accelerating, but outside of that, the black-clothed group around Miranda fired their arrows regardless. The knights and soldiers around him fell one after the next.

“W-wait!”

One of his guard knights cut down an arrow flying at him, firing magic from his left hand.

“Fire bullet!”

A small fireball headed for one of the black robes, causing its wearer to discard it and show his concealed figure. What came out was the form of a dark elf.

Seeing that, Raebel muttered.

“W-why. You should be with the elf woman… speaking to factions, that would be Novem’s…”

Miranda spoke without any interest.

“I borrowed them. There were rats who increase our workload when we’re so busy, so I was asked to exterminate them. When I said I wanted some helpers, she prepared them at once.”

Raebel knew Lyle’s fiancées did not get along by any means. Especially Novem and Miranda, she had investigated that they always kept a distance between themselves. He couldn’t believe they would ever work together.

“Y-you tricked us. In order to bait us in, you played…”

Miranda cut in at once.

“Wrong. I hate Novem, and I pretty much hate everyone else. But that doesn’t mean I’ll try to kick them down when there’s so much work to be done. We won’t drag each other down. I mean, of course we won’t. Lyle would be troubled. If there are a few noisy rats, we’ll hand them some bait and let them be, but… you were trying to change for Lyle’s sake, weren’t you?”

As Miranda went expressionless, she swung her right hand to the side. The daggers flew, sticking into the heads of the two knights that were before him.

Looking at the two men collapsing before his eyes, Raebel smiled a bit.

"… I had misread. If I knew, I'd have seriously tried seducing someone."

He was serious. While he did hate him, for the sake of the goal, for Lyle's sake he acted, and evaluated the women he cooperated with at times. And he learned Lyle was more wary a foe than he had imagined.

"If you knew… it's too late for that."

Miranda shrugged her shoulders.

"If you restrained yourself a bit more, perhaps one of us would have gotten in contact with you. How unfortunate, Count… your choices were mistaken."

Miranda raised her right hand and lowered it. Arrows and shells discharged coming down on what remained of Raebel's forces.

Deploying a magic shield in front of him, Raebel laughed.

"But this won't be enough to end me!"

Saying that, he gripped his hilt and started forward, the knights and soldiers close to him following behind.
Miranda smiled.

"I actually like this sort of idiocy. Has that boy-ish feel to it… but this is the end."

Miranda leisurely clenched her right hand, starting with her pinky. A number of spears appeared from the walls of the passage. It looked as if there had been a trap prepared there from the start, but all of the spears had been made by winding wires from her Skill.

Successively pierced by wires and cut apart, it became that Raebel was only attacking Miranda with a handful of men. As he lowered his sword at her, Miranda pulled the dagger hung at her hip with her right hand, parrying it. With the dagger in her left hand, she

sliced open his stomach.

As Miranda was forced to undo the magic light in her left hand, the surroundings went dark. And once the light was lit once more, Raebel was floating in the water…

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The training over, we pulled out the army and returned to Rhuvenns. So I was left to look upon the mountainous pile of papers in the office.

The Third took in the scene.

『It's because this sort of work increases that I'd rather have a moderate amount of territory to laze around in. Well, Lyle's already beyond the point of no return, thought.』

I touched my right hand to my face, looking down a bit. I knew this would happen, but there was too much work. True as it may be that it was best I participated in the training.

I wanted to believe that my constantly-active Skill Experience had some sort of effect, and in the case the absence of adventurers had caused an extreme increase in monsters, I had to manage the Labyrinth.

I understood it wasn't a complete waste of time.

In the office, and armored Unit One locked both her hands with Monica's, testing her strength.

"What a dirty girl to try building a market for yourself with the chicken while I was away."

"Master would never be satisfied with a scrap like you. Hand over your position already."

I heard a strange grating noise from both of them, but are they alright? I addressed Monica.

“Leave it at that. And did anything happen while I was away?”

Monica kicked Unit One aside, corrected her posture, and directed me a smile.

“There were a few minor problems, but because of Rauno-dono and Baldoir-dono, everything went off without a hitch. Some disturbing elements slipped in, but it was safely resolved. So we are in the middle of preparing a conspicuous reward for those two. As you have returned, it may be best to hold a ceremony for them alongside the knights to be promoted from your training.”

Was it anything serious? Well, if it was safely resolved, then all’s well.

“Baldoir’s quite capable. And I’m always being helped out by Rauno-san. I guess I’ll use this occasion to officially appoint him as a knight. So who made a move?”

Monica smiled.

“It was centered around a portion of Bahnseimian nobles. It let us put a nice, tight hold on the rest of them.

Don’t say it with a smile. That’s scary, is it not. As I thought that, I rolled my shoulders and made for the piles upon piles of paperwork piled on my desk.

Monica tried approaching with a smile, but Unit One’s arm came flying over, pulling her away from me.

“Y-you deteriorated defeccctt!!”

“I’ll scrap you on the spot, scrap metal!!”

Perhaps not to cause any trouble for me, they took their battle outside. Their faces were identical, so couldn’t they get along a bit better

Or rather…

“Hah, why can’t any of our women get along, I wonder.”

I couldn’t help but mutter it.

Not a Problem

… The room granted to Rauno in Rhuvenns castle.

【Rauno Bandelphia】sat over the sofa, removing his coat, tossing it over the sofa's back, and loosening the collar of his shirt. He had been officially recognized as a knight, but it's true there was some part of it he couldn't accept.

"Goddamit!"

The most irritating part was how he assisted in apprehending the ones moving suspiciously through Rhuvenns Castle. The assistance itself was all well and good. However, knowing it would be used like this made it a different story. Innis in the room hung her head near the wall.

Covering his face with both hands, Rauno on the sofa called out to her.

"… Why did you move on your own? It's true I had a lingering attachment to knighthood. But now that they know about your Skill, they'll definitely…"

Holding the Skill 【Information】 that let her carry out future predictions, she had a Skill in demand not only from those in authority. As based on her information, it was truly able to tell the future in every bit of detail, Rauno had concealed her Skill.

Innis looked down.

"I-I know. But having you become a knight was my dream as well."

Hearing that, it was difficult for Rauno to refute. For he had told Innis about his lingering knight attachments in his own complaints. He had done so because even if he didn't tell her, she would be able to learn it from whatever information she had on hand.

Rauno worried for her.

"… In palaces and castles and places like that, when the power

struggles get intense, people change. Do you think the current them will be the same in ten years' time? They'll definitely move forward. Miranda's the same. As a client, she pays well. While she gives jobs of high difficulty, she pays enough for it. As an individual, she's a good person. But… she'll definitely stick her hands into shady dealings. That's just the one we know. Thinking of what's to come…"

Rauno's forecast was on the mark. If Lyle took Bahnseim down, it would usher in an era of his rule. From there, problems of succession would come, and what awaited was a power struggle among the female camp.

If Innis requested Novem's help, Rauno was on Novem's side. No matter how you looked at it, it would mean Rauno had Novem's backing.

And that meant he would be dragged into power struggles and faction wars. Innis sounded apologetic.

"Even so, she's a person who honors promises. And she isn't one who'd take the initiative to start a war…"

"It isn't so simple! The world isn't so naïve where doing nothing means you won't be dragged into a war!"

While he didn't show it on his face, having witnessed such power struggles himself, Rauno felt terrible. And he knew Novem was a woman who came through when push came to shove.

That in mind, when the time came, who would be requesting his services? It was an elementary calculation.

"It's true she won't move on her own. But you know what happened in this case, right? The moment the Count gathered allies, she immediately ordered their disposal. Rather than making use of them, she thought of what was to come, and cut them off. Without consulting Lyle, even. She's a person who'd do that much. If those around her begin to move, she'll use whatever means."

After saying that much, Rauno cut off his words. And he turned to

Innis.

“… Sorry. You did your best for me. But please, don’t do this sort of thing again. Your Skill is too dangerous. And Lyle’s already made use of it, right?”

Innis made a dubious expression as she nodded.

“Y-yes. Twice.”

“… Two times, huh. What sort of things did he have you predict?”

On Rauno’s words, Innis first said something decent. But after that…

“When will Bahnseim attack, and… how can I avoid the marital pandemonium to come.”

Rauno raised his face, making a dubious expression himself.

“… Bahnseim’s a problem, but pandemonium is serious business as well. If it’s already come to that, the faction and power struggles are already on their way!”

Rauno held his head…

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… South Beim.

The Guild at the Labyrinth’s entrance was a little more in order than it was before.

Newbie adventurers were beginning to come out, and as the first-rate party had moved their home back to North Beim, Erhart’s adventurer party had become the greatest adventurer party in South Beim.

Their numbers were twice that of before, and including new

recruits, they had grown to almost fifteen in number. Showing his face at the Guild counter, Erhart headed to receptionist Rühe's desk. Of course, that was the only receptions desk, so there was nowhere else to go.

"Ah, Erhart-san!"

Turning to Rühe as she waved her hand, Erhart awkwardly waved back. Looking around, the newbie adventurers were glaring at him. As Rühe was a cute-type receptionist, she naturally had high popularity among the adventurers.

She had once taken on newbie rearing at Beim's east branch, and she was used to her work by this point. She dealt with adventurers skillfully, and was the admiration of the new recruits.

"Y-yo. Sorry, but could I confirm a few things? Entering the Labyrinth is fine and all, but it's about time requests to go outside came in."

As Erhart wasn't particularly a specialist in collecting Magic Stones and materials in the Labyrinth, he wanted to turn an eye to the requests of South Beim's surroundings and the nearby villages.

For inexperienced as they were, Erhart's party was the number one party in South Beim.

South Beim's Guild and Merchants, those higher ups were assertively petitioning him to do so as well. Meaning such orders had come from Lyle. Erhart hadn't been called out by name, but as there were only new recruits around, in the end, Erhart's party had to be the one doing the requests.

Scratching his head, he ignored surrounding eyes as he talked to Rühe. But he could still here them. It was a small Guild compared to Beim's. It was only natural for sound to travel.

"What's with that tank top dastard?"
"He's the number one adventurer in South Beim… because there's no one better."
"I'll surpass a guy like him in no time, and then Rühe-chan will…"

Hearing those voices, Erhart felt somewhat embarrassed for some reason.

(… Dammit Lyle, he watched over my outbursts with such warm eyes. So this is why. That guy definitely has a terrible personality.)

Having calmed down a bit and managing to look at what was around him, Erhart recalled his past self and felt embarrassed.

“For outside requests, we have the pre-highway-maintenance cleanup. During the actual work, they’ll have soldiers and guards, but they’ve made a request for the Guild to sweep away the area’s monsters beforehand. But I feel a bit anxious leaving it to the other parties.”

From the request’s contents, in South Beim loaded with newbies, Erhart’s party was about the only one capable of fulfilling it. Erhart nodded.

“We’ve taken a few newcomers on, and we’re training them, but it’ll be some time before they start to take shape. Even if I put them on odd jobs, they’ll grow lax without anyone to watch them, so it’ll be some time before they can stand on their own. And wait, I’m little more than a newbie myself.”

There, Rühe frantically started complimenting him.

“What are you saying!? When the first-rate Labyrinth specialists were here, you volunteered for odd jobs, and taught everyone all about them, didn’t you? I think someone who can do something like that is… a-amazing.”

Seeing Rühe’s face turn a little red, Erhart could only say, “R-right.”

(… Why is it? Why is it that women are noticing me now? They used to run away even if I tried chasing.)

Filled with conflicted feelings, Erhart let out a sigh as he received the form and confirmed its contents. How many to take, who to take along, and who to let rest. While he thought over various things, a voice called over from behind.

A group of some around the same age as Erhart. Freshly recruited adventurers had formed a party, wearing a confident attitude.

“Hey, Rühe-chan, could you give that request to us? I think we’re just about capable enough to do it. If we’re stuck on cleaning and odd jobs forever, it’ll build up stress, or rather…”

He wanted to take on the request going to Erhart. But Rühe gave a serious reply.

“Please say something like that after you’ve gotten at least a 【C】 evaluation on an odd jobs request. And your equipment isn’t adequate for the request. You have to get together at least the bare minimum equipment before you go into battle.”

As the newbie adventurers stood vexed, eyes gathered on Erhart.

“B-but just look at how this guy’s dressed, and his party is…”

He started complaining about Erhart, but as those around watched, their evaluation of the new adventurers only dropped. Regardless of how they wanted to show off their good sides to Rühe, seeing them move so fruitlessly made Erhart so embarrassed he felt his face would burst into flames.

It was at that moment. Worrying for Erhart who had yet to return, one of his party members entered the guild.

… A female adventurer.

“Erhart, are you done going over the requests? Then come shopping with me. Remembered how a new shop opened on the way? I wanted to check it out.”

An adventurer once charmed through Skill by an adventurer of Cartaffs named Larc. On the appearance of that talented and beautiful woman, Rühe stared at her jealously.

“Erhart-san is in the middle of confirming his request. If you’re going shopping, why not do it on your own? Interfering with your leader’s job, what does that make you as an adventurer?”

On Rühe's thorny words, Erhart's heart began racing. The newbie adventurers were also troubled.

The female adventurer spoke.

"I'm not trying to get in the way. If he's in the middle of it, then I'll just wait. Isn't that fine? And this a problem within the party, so I don't want a receptionist inserting herself into it."

Erhart thought.

(Damn, why didn't they keep her away? They should've known I was going to the Guild.)

'They' were the youths from the same village as he, accompanying him as adventurers from his earlier days. They had come to Beim with Erhart, and were the ones who raised problems with Lyle after becoming adventurers. He had told his comrades to keep the female adventurers away.

But the result was as he could see, it was getting on in the Guild.

"In the first place, Erhart-san is the number one adventurer in South Beim. Because of that, he has to concentrate on his work. Since you girls are so skilled, why don't you make a new party or something, and take on a few requests yourselves?"

On Rühe's words, the female adventurer spoke.

"I caused some problems in Cartaffs. Erhart was assigned to watch me, and with the party's interest in mind, it's unthinkable to divide our fighting power. That's why it's said that receptionists can only see their own circumstance. We've got quite a few troubles of our own. Enough that we'd even want some more hands."

In such a rowdy Guild. From the stairs in the depths of the Guild, Marianne descended with a bundle of papers in her hands.

"Oh, another fight? Rühe, could you leave your little tiff there? If you don't work the receptions desk, you'll trouble our dear adventurers."

Marianne cautioned Rühe. There, Erhart awkwardly looked at Marianne, scratching his hair as he awkwardly gave his greetings.

“Pleasure.”

“… Yes, it’s been a while. Erhart-kun. I’ve heard you’re working hard. I’m happy for you.”

She smiled as she responded, but there was a peculiar air between the two. Seeing it form, Rühe puffed out her cheeks, while the female adventurer touched her chest to Erhart’s back as she spoke.

“Hey, confirm the request already.”

“I-I will! So get away from my back.”

Erhart hurriedly turned his eyes back to the papers. The newbie adventurers watched with their mouths stuck open…

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Inside Rhuvenns Castle.

Jumping up and down nearby, Shannon tried to make a meal of the pudding I held out of her reach.

“Hey, give it back! That’s my flan!”

“Bullocks! No matter how you think about it, this is mine. And wait, you’ve already eaten two, haven’t you! The empty plates are proof enough!”

When I left the office and headed to a dining hall separate from the general one, I found Shannon eating. Eating the flan left on the table.

There was only one flan left… no matter how you looked at it, that was my flan.

“You’re a man, so show some self-control! And they said I could eat anything that was left over!”

“And I’m right here, so it won’t be a leftover! Even I like sweet things. Rather, you already ate two, why don’t you show some self-control!? No, restraint!”

Realizing she couldn’t get steal it with her height, she grabbed my clothing and began to shake me down.

“Today’s flan was especially good! I couldn’t eat any desserts these days, you hear!”

“That’s because you kept making mistakes in your work. They’re your mistakes! It’s your fault for dazing out!”

The dining hall… even if it was called that, our dining hall could only be used by a select few. Only me and those related to me. For that sake, there wasn’t anyone around besides Shannon and me. So we could shout as much as we wanted.

“Stingy! Stingy Lyle!”

“Greedy! Greedy Shannon!”

I think the stress from work had flipped a strange switch. As we were acting up, the door to the room opened. The dining hall had been set for four. One was probably Lianne, but I didn’t know the other.

The moment my attention was taken, Shannon pulled down my arm, causing the flan to fly through the air as I pulled it back.

The flan continued on its trajectory towards the woman with red hair… Aria’s face. The scene played back to me as if in slow motion.

The flan’s form fell apart, sticking and splattering across Aria’s face before falling limply to the ground. Aria stayed silent for a while, but…

“… You can understand what I want to say, right?”

I immediately.

“N-no! That was Shannon!”

Shannon violently shook her hand to deny it.

“That’s wrong. Lyle did it!”

Licking the flan stuck to her face, Aria’s eyes gradually grew sharper… looking at the table, she noticed there was no flan left.

“Where’s my flannn!!?”

“I’m sooooorrrrrryyyy!”

Saying that, Shannon raced out of the room, and a little delayed, I leapt out of the room as well.

“Oy, don’t kid me! Why are you running away alone!? This is all your fault, you hear!”

Catching up to Shannon, who was only quick on her feet when it came to things like this, as we ran through the hallway, a red blur of something passed through the space between us and manifested before us.

Shannon stopped in her tracks.

“H-how unfair! Using a Skill is unfair!”

Aria looked at Shannon.

“You’re one to talk! I heard you used your Skill to mess with Miranda in various ways. Anyways, who’s the one who stole away my enjoyment?”

As Aria cricked the fingers of her hand, I pointed at Shannon.

“Y-you sold me out, Lyle!”

“No, you’re the one who ate it. What’s more you ate a second one too, right? This is definitely your fault, I’m telling you. You angered poor Aria.”

As I said that and laughed, Aria placed a hand on my shoulder.

“Then Lyle will have to repent for smacking me with his flan. I did see that one.”

… Yep, I knew it would come to that. That’s why I ran.

Ms. Lianne

… Around the time Lyle was arguing about flan.

The source of this feud, who'd eaten three whole flans herself, Lianne had her pink hair tied back as she chewed on the end of a pen. The pen's tip bobbed up and down, a document before her eyes. She dealt with papers off her massive pile one after the next.

And as she speedread through it, confirming its contents in an instant, she offered a word.

"This one's no good."

She searched for the name of the officer who'd filled out the form. She looked through countless pages every day, and it was a name she'd seen numerous times. Perhaps the officer wasn't aware, but the price of goods was inflating.

Lianne had a general grasp of the prices, and she would overlook discrepancies to an extent. It wasn't guaranteed that every single civil officer knew the exact price, and there were times the price was raised for purchases. They were in a hurry to gather goods together, so it was fine if they were overcharged a bit.

However, clear fraud was a different issue.

"Even to commit fraud, when it's so clear, it's an indication of their ability. They'll be a bother even if we work them to the bone as a grunt, so… do you have a moment?"

Her office.

Calling over a Valkyrie automaton who's brought tea, Lianne removed the pen from her mouth before she spoke.

"We need to make an example to straighten out our officers. Make arrangements to station this person somewhere random."

As she handed the document to the Valkyrie, Lianne was chuckling. Accepting, the automaton could guess the general just of the issue.

"… Random, is it. I shall make the arrangements."

And taking the next paper in hand, Lianne confirmed its contents in an instant before signing her approval.

She continued processing them one after the next, but at times, her work would stop, and she'd think to herself.

"… Clara-san, was it? Since she couldn't get any funding from Beim, she made the request to us. Good grief, the optimizing of the transport force is indispensable."

The document in her hands was from Clara. It was also written that Adele had vetoed it. It was document on the Porter unit… meaning the unit formed to transport supplies. Lianne quickly did the calculations in her head, and could say nothing other than that it would be difficult to procure the necessary funding.

"Generally, we'd have to rely on tax yields. We're somehow managing with the treasures sucked up and offered from Beim."

The Valkyrie placed a cup of tea on the table.

"Offered? I am sure the merchants intended it to be a loan, correct?"

"That's irrelevant. I plan to stick on some reasons to counterbalance. From end to end, Lyle's too soft. Developing South Beim free of charge, conceding the rights to the ports… it would be troublesome if they took all our cooperation as a given. Vera-san, was it? When he's got a merchant house girl with him, I can understand why he'd grow soft. But there are no ends to a merchant's demands. You have to keep them in order."

Lyle had given considerable favorable treatment to the merchants of South Beim, with Fidel as their representative. But Lianne could only see it as soft.

"Even if you've favors to them, there should be a limit. When he has some strangely downright nasty sides to him, he's still soft here and there. How did he get all the way here?"

Determining it was possible to secure the funding, Lianne hurriedly drafted up the form. She had to give orders to all the relevant offices, but she also started drafting one for Adele in Beim.

The reason she'd stop all other work and go so far was because she had determined the transport unit's optimization was an absolute necessity.

Lowering the number of horses required meant that just as many horses could be repurposed for other things. Horses for cavalry. Horses for agriculture, and other such uses could create some financial leisure.

"Adele-san has to broaden her field of vision a bit more. I'm sure she'd be fine on a feudal lord level, but perhaps it will be hard for her to manage an entire country. Well, she'll just have to get used to it."

Her work speed exceeded Lyle's, and she processed them precisely.

Now that Faunbeux was their ally, she was a necessary personal to Lyle's party.

However…

"… More importantly, how is Lyle faring? I left enough flan for everyone to have one."

Without stopping her working hands, she ran her mouth and awaited a response from the Valkyrie in the room. The monotone response was…

"On top of a battle over flan ownership, that flan struck Aria on the face, it seems. Right now, they are arguing in the corridor. I have received a few reports from my sisters. It's the worst."

As she relayed the reports of the Valkyries in the castle, Lianne chuckled to herself.

"Oh, how terrible. While I did take a generous portion, I did properly leave three for three people. Monica-san did say she made too much, and it was fine if I ate it. That they're arguing about it is

their own fault. No, perhaps Shannon's fault? When I left the room, she was on her second flan."

The Valkyrie asked her.

"Do you hate my master? Looking at the circumstances behind your engagement, I do feel it a little impossible to ask you to love him."

Lianne made a bit of a perplexed face. She took a sip of tea.

"… I don't hate him. I can't say I love him. Even like this, I've been engaged once before, so I can't change over to another man so skillfully. Well, the seat of empress is quite appealing, and I'm sure my home is supporting me for it, so I'll make it my goal."

Hearing the seat of empress, the Valkyrie tilted her head.

"Is it really so appealing? From a woman's point of view, is it not happiness to be able to marry the one you love?"

The Valkyrie was made with an automaton's core at its base, and its perfection was based on the standards of the ancients. Hearing that Valkyrie's opinion, Lianne laughed.

"You do have a point. But nothing ever goes exactly as one hopes. If I truly loved Lyle from the start… then I'd have done my best to move and eliminate all the other women."

The Valkyrie expressionlessly watched over Lianne's laugh. But perhaps Lianne felt she didn't want to be misunderstood, as she offered a revision.

"He was surrounded by women from the start. What's more, I personally am not particularly interested. I'll put some effort into loving him, but that's a work in progress. Nothing I can do to speed it up. Then at the very least, isn't it fine if I set my sights on the empress seat?"

There, the Valkyrie spoke.

"… Is that how it works? Very well, then this Valkyrie Unit Thirty Four shall do her best to facilitate the two of you. Leave it to me. To

be honest, I could care less who ends up becoming empress. As long as my master is happy, I did not really have interest in the others. But it must be some sort of fate that I was stationed to serve at your side! I promise assistance to the best of my ability. First, to get a step ahead of the other women… why not build a physical relation with him? I shall open the lock of my master's bedroom for you."

Valkyrie… Thirty Four showed her motivation. With her long black hair bundled with a ribbon near its end, Unit Thirty Four expressionlessly lifted her clenched right fist towards the heavens.

"… Eh?"

Seeing the Valkyrie like that, Lianne seemed largely confused…

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… The Walt House mansion.

At his desk, Maizel was writing a letter to his wife Claire, and one for his daughter Celes. Its contents stated his apologetic sentiment that he would be late to come to Centralle.

But in each letter he wrote, 'I'll definitely bring back a present that will delight you'. Looking at the letter's contents, it was easy to surmise that meant Lyle's head.

While he waited for the ink to dry, he prepared an envelope. An envelope for Claire, and an envelope for Celes.

A knock came to his room.

"Come in."

The one who entered was Beil. A knight with the position of Maizel's trusted adjutant, and a reliable man on the battlefield.

"Maizel-sama, the preparations are in order. We can depart

anytime… a letter?"

He looked atop Maizel's desk, and Maizel nodded.

"Celes sent a letter telling me to come quickly. Claire said she would be heading to Centralle first. It's no good to make a woman angry. I've prepared letters and some presents."

A number of letters had come from Celes and Claire saying they wanted him to come to Centralle. Normally, the only one Celes would do something like that for would be her parents. In the case that someone else kept her waiting, treatments ranged from disposal by the surroundings to a personal torture and execution from Celes herself.

That's just how important of an existence Maizel was to her. While other people held value akin to nothing, her parents alone were separate.

"Currying favor with women? It's because even you're like that, that I feel ashamed as a man."

To Beil's joke, Maizel laughed.

"I think it would be scarier if they stop showing any reaction at all. Now then, we must be off. And what happened to the Randbergh House's participation in this war?"

As Maizel rose to his feet, Beil's expression grew stiff.

"… They cannot send out troops. They used casualties from bandit subjugation as a reason, but how sorrowful a tale to hear from my own home. My brother's grown old. And for my nephew Baldoir to suffer injury at the hands of a bandit…"

Seeing Beil's apologetic face, Maizel spoke.

"Based on how things go, you may be succeeding the Randbergh House. Well, it's somethine we can all get together and decide once we get back."

The two left the room.

The Walt House was finally beginning its march on Rhuvenns…

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Inside Rhuvenns castle.

The main members had gathered in the meeting room. Of course, the only ones able to gather at once were General Blois, Baldoir, Lianne and Monica. The others were off working elsewhere, and they wouldn't be back for a few days.

I turned to those gathered in the conference room as I spoke.

"… Word came in. It seems the Walt House began to move. Around eighty percent of their vassals are tagging along, and on top of that, the neighboring lords have move. Their numbers are fifty thousand. Their pure fighting force is around thirty five thousand, apparently."

General Blois touched a hand to his chin.

"That's a bit much. If it were fifty thousand, I thought their fighting troops would number below thirty thousand. The Walt House seems to put a firm effort into rear support, after all."

Monica relayed the contents of the report to everyone.

"They are making use of the Porter developed in Arumsaas. They have the personnel gathered, and it seems they've greatly optimized their transport."

Lianne listened to the report.

"We've made some progress there as well. If the enemy comes to invade, the battlefield will be our territory, so we'll be at an advantage when it comes to resupplying, but… let my ask bluntly. Are the preparations ready?"

What Lianne asked was about the military. Were we ready?

I was a little discontent, but I spoke the truth.

“We’ll be fighting near the border, so the preparations are underway. But that’s at seventy percent. We have a grasp on the terrain, and the preparations to intercept them, but there’s a slight problem with the troop formation.”

Baldoir took over my explanation.

“Our horses and equipment is insufficient. We have more troops than the enemy, but it is not an overwhelming difference. In pure fighting soldiers, we can mobilize fifty thousand.”

Lianne put it plainly.

“So while we win in numbers, we can’t reach double. If we put out too many casualties, even if we win, it’ll be a huge problem. It will be difficult to supplement our troops.”

Right. It was difficult for us to secure troops. There were no inhabitants of the ruined land of Rhuvenns. Beim was quite exhausted. Regardless of whether we lost, or won at great cost, there would be a problem with securing troops.

General Blois let out a sigh.

“More than simple numbers, there’s a problem with quality, you see. The Walt House… it has an adequate reason to be called Bahnseim’s strongest. How should I put it. Even among the soldiers, there are many stronger than the average knight. It’s a bit hard to understand why they’d have to train them to that level.”

There, the Third and Seventh in the Jewel gave voices that indicated they didn’t feel sorry at all.

『Sorry Blois-kun. See, the Second told me to do it. I just followed his words. Really sorry.』

『… A single large reason is that Centralle kept relying on the Walt House, forcing us to build up the knowhow. Well, it’s the Walt

Army we raised up. There's no way in hell it would be weak!♩

Starting with our founder, the army passed down to my father, the Eighth Generation Head Maizel Walt.

I knew it already, but how troublesome.

The dead men led by Breid was one thing, but this time, on top of being resolved for death, they were Walt House soldiers. What's more, Skills were unusable. Though I'm not sure to what extent.

Lianne, in regards to us.

"At the very least, to bring about our final battle with Bahnseim, we'll need at least a hundred thousand troops. You're all more knowledgeable on battle than me, but the problem stands that if our Leader Lyle doesn't have enough troops, the surrounding countries shall make light of him."

It wasn't that all would be well if we won. And I had to fight my father under that situation.

I looked over everyone.

"To speak to the contrary, if we grasp victory here, we will be that much closer to taking Bahnseim down. Surrounding it with enemy countries, rendering Bahnseim's capital… Centralle immobile, we'll be able to approach with ease. Bahnseim lost troops in the previous battle. If we can defeat the Walt Army here…"

General Blois shrugged his shoulders.

"… It's been nothing but rebellions within the countries. I'm sure you'll get loads of feudal lords who'll cooperate if you do."

In a sense, this battle seized the light and dark of my fight with Bahnseim. If they inclined once, it would be hard for Bahnseim to recover. Even for Celes.

And Baldoir addressed all.

"The Walt House is a threat, but the other lords taking part are a

threat as well. Among our former friends, I think we should be plenty wary of the Forxuz House."

Hearing that Forxuz House, Lianne.

"That would be Novem-san's House. Are they really so threatening?"

I recalled the Forxuz House. Novem… tribe of the evil god. Novem who was strong even among them was at my side, but that tribe was included in my father's troops.

Baldoir spoke.

"Of course. They're akin to master and servant with the Walt House, so while they're often spoken lightly of… having seen them myself, they're an ample threat. Especially their family heirs, they have always been first-rate experts at magic. I believe you will understand if you look at Novem… sama's ability."

In a battlefield without Skills, Magic would become a vital point. At such a time, the Forxuz House excelling in magic would become a threat.

(How does Novem feel about fighting her home?)

I thought, as I issued orders around.

The Goddam Chicks

“Those deteriorated defects… no matter how you think about it, looking after the chicks is my job as well. Oh, before those idiots get here, I’ll have to switch out the lock for that damn chicken’s bedroom.”

… Night.

Producing a tool from space between her skirt and apron, Monica hummed as she dexterously switched out the lock to Lyle’s room.

Having misgivings at the Valkyries suddenly getting heated over looking after the chicks… Lyle’s children, she had made her move.

The exchange complete, she opened the door and offered a line.

“I’ve also installed iron plates in the door, so it won’t be breached so easily. If you force your way in, the chicken will be shocked awake, and the night crawling will end in failure… you fools, all of those goddam cute little chicks belong to me!”

After bursting into maniacal laughter, she tested the lock and iron plating installed on the inside of the door before closing it. She moved to hand Lyle his new key…

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… The one clinging to the wall of Rhuvenns Castle was Valkyrie Unit Nine.

She had seen Monica’s relieved face at changing the lock from outside the window. On top of her black clothing, her form stuck to the wall looked like a suspicious intruder from all angles.

“… Covet what falls through your petty hands all you will. You may have the higher specs, but… you do not seem to understand our

superiority in number. An important person of the past once said it. War is numbers, brother."

(TL: This is a quote from Dozle Zabi, commander of Zeon's space forces during the One Year War)

Unit nine, in an attempt to work on Lyle's room's lock, entered in through the window. But as the glass quietly opened, and she landed in the hall, the other Valkyries dressed in black appeared before the door as well.

One had climbed down from the ceiling, another appeared from the corner…

"Y-you all…!"

As Unit Nine stood and entered a battle stance, Unit Thirty Two took out the tools she planned to use on the lock as a weapon.

"It looks like we are all thinking the same. But I have already instigated Aria-san, so I cannot step down."

Holding up her fists, Unit Fifty One said showed no signs of letting up either.

"I could say much the same. According to Unit Thirty Four, she'll institute a rotation system with looking after the dear chicks… I cannot be standing down here!"

Unit Nine looked at the two of them, and offered a proposal.

"Wait a minute. Don't you think we can work together? There is no meaning in us fighting amongst ourselves here. For everyone's sake, let us join hands and…"

There, three maid-clothed Valkyries… rushed onto the scene.

"I will not let you!"
"What are you doing in front of our master's room!?"
"Intruders. Eliminate. Even if they are sisters, they are strangers to me the moment they put on such strange attire. Rivals shall disappear."

As the three units said such extreme things, the black-donning three went into negotiations.

“P-please wait. Can we all just… get along…”

There, the maid-clothed Valkyries spoke.

“… How unfortunate. We are on the Shannon ship. Even if the others gain chicks of their own, it will surely be in the distant future for us. That is why… we have determined you are merely in the way!”
“I shall not let the chance to obtain a uselessly cute chick slip away!”
“A chick that inherits Shannon-san’s uselessness… I think it is simply wonderful.”

“How cruel! Pulling down the others in your plight… I feel just a little mad that I am jealous of you.”

The automaton maids that were once supposed to be proficient were carrying on quite a disappointing conversation. Before the door, they stood stanced with their various pieces of hardware and cleaning tools without moving an inch.

The one watching them from afar was Lyle who’d finished his work. Seeing them at a distance, he silently turned towards his office.

“I guess I’m sleeping in the office tonight. Already have blankets and all.”

And with that, the Valkyries before the room to which Lyle would not return continued facing one another, holding their positions until morning came…

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These days, you know.

I haven't returned to my room. Monica handed me a new key, and there were Valkyries holding their weapons(?) and facing one another before the door.

Whenever I ask, they say something about chicks or something… rather, isn't it strange that it's already been set in stone my children will be called chicks? What's this? Doesn't that mean while they don't say it, everyone's already recognized me as a chicken dickwad?

From that day, I began sleeping in the office, or some other room. At times, I'd slept in General Blois' office as well. After talking about work, he would let me sleep on his sofa.

"Why do I have to run around like this?"

As I gave some complaints, the Third laughed.

『Isn't it cute? You know, chicks? Still, it's true it's a problem you can't leave be. But right now, the timing's too off.』

The Walt House had moved, and the inside of the castle was so frantic, and yet these Valkyries keep raising up unnecessary trouble… those cores were definitely influencing them in a strange way. As I thought that, I couldn't help but feel the implacability of the creators who carved those cores out, those ancients.

In the palace courtyard, I looked over the knights and soldiers who'd finished preparing as I thought over such trivial things.

But the Seventh spoke seriously.

『… If possible, it would be best if you had at least one child. This coming war will influence what's to come. In settling things with Bahnseim, you could call it the turning point.』

The Third cautioned me.

『In the fight with Bahnseim, that is. Celes is a separate problem, Lyle.』

Even if you asked me about children, with the embarrassment and

all the various problems they would bring, I couldn't give an answer. There, the Seventh spoke.

『Lyle, come to the Jewel tonight. We have to talk a bit. You were raised in a bit of a special environment. So it seems you don't understand, but… to tie with blood is an extremely important thing.』

I could understand what he was trying to say. I gripped the Jewel to show my approval as I looked around.

We were ready to march, and the main members were gathered. The forces of North and South Beim had joined, and reinforcements from the alliance had come.

Cartaffs and Djanpear weren't able to participate, but even so, we were ready.

Wearing my armor of blue and white, I held my helmet in my left hand as I looked up at the sky. The sparse white clouds flowed through the bright blue sky. The morning cold had let up a bit with the emergence of the sun. I could feel the warmth of the light of day.

Novem sauntered over to me.

"Lyle-sama, we are ready to march. There are some units who have already begun to move. We have to hurry. You need to give an address once we arrive."

As Novem spoke of my schedule, I answered a little tiredly.

"I just gave an address yesterday. Well, that's also my job… Novem, the Forxuz House is moving too. You don't have to force yourself to…"

When I said that much, Novem shook her head to the side.

I tried to make her step back a few times, but it seems she had no such intent.

"From the moment I left the Weihs territory with you, I cut off all

ties to my house. Even if they're against me, I'm sure my father and brother won't hesitate. Of course, I won't be hesitating either."

With eyes that didn't show any wavering resolve, Novem looked at me. "I see," I said and walked off. The main members around followed behind.

"… Fighting family sure is painful."

I thought I had muttered it so no one could hear, but it seems Novem caught it. And the words she sent back were…

"I'm sure you'll be able to overcome it, Lyle-sama. Please be more confident in yourself."

Perhaps I should call them Novem-esque words. That's what they were.

Carrying on memories, the Forxuz House that served the Walt. The tribe that carried the power of Novem, the one called an evil god.

There was much to think about, but before that… I needed to concentrate on my father, Maizel Walt.

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Night.

Lying down in Porter's loading tray, I sent my consciousness in to the Jewel.

I was called there by the Seventh, and I could somewhat understand the reason he called me over. If he wanted to talk, I only had to find a spot I could talk to him alone.

If that wasn't the case, there was something he wanted me to see… it meant the time had come for him to show me his memory.

The Seventh waited across the table, the Third wasn't anywhere around.

"Where's the Third?"

『He left his seat. He probably thought it wasn't necessary to watch over us. Of all else, the memory I'm going to show you is… it would be faster just to show you.』

Saying that, I chased after the Seventh as he walked towards his room, and followed into his room of memories.

There, the scene I saw was the Seventh in his younger days.

The young Seventh… Brod Walt was in tears.

『… Aunty.』

It was the parlor of the Walt House mansion. Stopped near the door was an extravagant carriage, and a wagon for the luggage. The wagon had a roof strung over it as well. What's more, there were knights accompanying the horses around.

It seems the wagon had something valuable loaded onto it, and the Sixth Generation Head Fiennes, and even the Fifth Generation Fredricks had come out.

Fiennes patted Brod's head.

『Don't look so sad. To Milleia, this offer was her last chance. It would be pitiful to see her alone forever, dammit.』

I looked at the Seventh standing beside me.

"Doesn't the Sixth sound just a bit rude?"

The Seventh nodded.

『You're right. Well, he's the sort of person who can say such things and be forgiven.』

Milleia-san laughed. The Fifth, Fredricks had taken a bit of distance,

not trying to add himself to the conversation.

『Brother, you make it sound as if I'm an old hag who missed her chance for marriage. Well, I won't say you're wrong. I do understand that this is my final chance. Well then, Brod-kun, I'll be off.』

Milleia-san leaned over to match Brod's eye level, her golden eyes gazing at the boy.

『You'll find someone. Someone better than me… and be sure to avoid twisted people like me. Because you're quite the earnest one, Brod-kun.』

As she laughed a bit, Fiennes came in from the side.

『What's up? What are you two whispering about?』

As Fiennes sent a smile, Milleia-san smiled back and said, "It's nothing." How fitting of her, I guess.

And without looking at the Seventh's face, I…

"… Could it be your first love was…"

『Probably my aunt. Though I didn't understand at my age. When I was in the mansion, she was a conversation partner. Father was always busy, but more than that, the only one who ever understood my troubles was aunty.』

The surrounding scenery went grey, and once it faded away, a different scene took its place. In it, Milleia-san and Brod were doing something in the yard.

Preparing something like an enemy, Milleia-san was holding a gun that could only load one cartridge.

Regaining its color, the scene slowly began to move.

『It's painful to be compared to my brothers? That's a poser. I'm sure my brother is just pushing the halberd onto you because he's eager to teach. I doubt he's thinking as far as having you surpass

him, or anything like that.』

Hanging his head, Brod raised his face a bit, and looked at Milleia-san's gun.

『… Even if that's how father feels, that's not how the others will think. Um, could you teach me how to use a gun?』

Milleia-san looked a little surprised, trying to say something. But she stopped, shook her head, and gave Brod a smile.

『Well, there's nothing to be lost in learning something new, so I'll teach you. When you get to my level, you can even do something like this.』

Saying that, she took a stance without even looking at the target, and discharged a bulled right into its center. On the other side, the bullet embedded into the wall.

『T-this is it. If I have this, I can perform like my father!』

In regards to Brod's joy, Milleia-san gave a bit of a troubled smile.

『I don't think you have to be so mindful of it. Even my brother isn't a perfect head, after all. I think it's best you try to become the sort of Walt House head that suites you.』

But even hearing her words, Brod cast his eyes downwards.

『… I'm studying a lot. I've piled up loads of training. But everyone around simply keeps talking about how amazing my father was. I know he's amazing. I'm proud to have him as my father. But I am not as strong as him.』

Milleia-san consoled him.

『The previous generation Fredricks was small-built, but even so, he used his own way to…』

『But he was still strong! Everyone says father and grandfather were amazing! Generation after generation, the Walt House… has always been a strong lineage. But I… I'm…』

I looked at the Seventh. There, he looked a little embarrassed.

『At the time, no matter what I did, I could only see my father and grandfather's… the Sixth and Fifth's backs. I thought of them as a large wall I'd never get passed. I mean, everyone around kept praising them to high heavens. And also. The Walt House continued to grow. I could feel it weighing down on me.』

I got the feeling I understood him a bit. My father Maizel Walt was the same. He pursued what it meant to be a noble.

Thinking back on it now, he pursued it too far. Different from me, who came into contact with the memories of the First through Seventh, and came to a conclusion from that.

Grown on the beautified hearsay of his ancestors, the Seventh stood within a great pressure.

『It grew heavier by the generation. We have to leave stories for the next one. And how are they going to speak of us? The obligations and responsibilities grew heavier the larger the house grew. The more my father won, the more the Walt House's fame increased. But what about me? I often found myself thinking it.』

As I was listening seriously, the Seventh gave a purposeful clearing of his throat.

『Anyways, it's that. If you're asking what I want to say… I want to see my great grandchild's face.』

After I opened my mouth and stared blankly a while…

"Eh? That? Just how was that related to the story? Rather, what are you even talking about?"

As I stared at him fixatedly, the Seventh tried justifying it. Throwing in hand gestures.

『No, I mean, right!? This and that happens with the generations pile up, but it isn't all bad things. And also. If you don't have children, the house falls to ruin.』

He does have a point. But when it was such a serious talk, who was to think it would suddenly turn to that?

There, the Seventh muttered.

『… Lyle, if you fight Maizel, there's a chance one of you will die. No, I'm sure one of you will. And Maizel's Zenoire's boy. Just as you were talented, Maizel was talented as well. So originally, I was just thinking it best you left a child before you go off to battle.』

I spoke to the Seventh.

"If we lose, everything's lost regardless."

『Even so. There's a large problem. But if you don't have any children, you've no one to carry it on. No matter how high you raise your enterprise, if there's no one to succeed it, it only remains a mark in history. I'll be blunt. Legal wives and factions, having all those problems is better than not having a child at all.』

As I stood unable to answer, he went on.

『… My honest feelings are so: I don't want to see you and Maizel fight. But there's no turning back.』

It seems my fight with my father had invited a sense of crisis onto the Seventh. From that, I could anticipate my father was definitely strong. Enough that the Seventh had misgivings about my victory…

Brod and Maizel

It was the memories of my grandfather the Seventh, and Maizel… the Eighth.

Son of grandma Zenoire, the Eighth Generation Head was extremely talented. Brod didn't choose his father's halberd, instead pursuing his own style with the gun. He said it came from his desire not to be compared with his own father, the Sixth.

In the Walt House closest to the one of my memory, Brod confronted Maizel and spoke.

『Guns are nice, Maizel. Just by pulling the trigger, you can hit enemies far away. And unlike the bow, these days, their output has also…』

As Brod told tales of the gun's appeal, the young boy Maizel tilted his head.

『Is that really so? On top of the limited bullets you can carry, replenishing ammunition costs a lot of money. And it's possible to block them with ease. Against soldiers is one thing, but I think the effect will be low against knights. If that's the case, the even a crossbow would be better.』

『… Eh?』

Brod had bought the boy a nice gun, but after being told such a thing, it was impossible to hand over the present, it seems. Hiding it behind his back, he made a troubled face.

As Brod laughed with that troubled face, he gestured around with one hand.

『R-really? But right now, they're sporting cool designs as well. You should carry at least one on…』

I'm sure this Maizel hadn't even turned ten. Yet at that age, he seemed quite reliable. He was looking up at his father Brod.

『No, I'm fine. I've already chosen a weapon that suites me. I discussed it with my martial arts teacher, and decided to pick up the sabre. As I'm good at magic, my means for long range attack are already flawless.』

I felt like covering my eyes, as I took a glance at the Seventh beside me. The Brod of memories dropped his shoulders.

『… I-I see. Then I'll get you a nice sabre.』

『No, I've already put in a request for one to be made. It was a tad expensive, but mother told me that a little quality goes a long way.』

I looked at the Seventh. Unlike I'd ever seen him, with quiet a hesitant look.

There, he covered his face with a hand as he spoke.

『Y-yeah. Truly talented. Maizel himself wasn't trying to make fun of me or anything, I think. I hope. In all actuality, his courtesy was perfect. But personally, I'd like to have pampered him more, or rather, if he wasn't so reliable… I thought about it a number of times.』

He had experienced a youth anguishing over whether he would be worthy to lead the house, Yet when he tried to make sure his son never had to go through such a thing, he was brilliantly shot down.

I looked at the young form of father.

"Come to think of it, that's right. My father carries the blood of Septem."

The Seventh sighed. But he could've at least been a bit cuter, or so there was no doubt he thought. He was so proficient, perhaps he put an unnecessarily greater pressure on the Seventh.

『I do understand it's a problem of the rich. But even if I didn't teach him, Maizel would learn well. His tutors would all sing praise of him. Though it seems he didn't actually inherit any of Septem's memory, apparently.』

My father was talented. I thought I understood that, but I couldn't quite remember what sort of person he was.

And as the scenery changed, Brod was sitting on his bed, hanging his shoulders. His hands held the gun he had intended as a present.

Looking tiredly upon him was…

"Grandma Zenoire."

… The Seventh's wife, and the one who passed Septem's blood into the Walt House. Wearing a red dress, she looked at Brod and sighed.

『What are you so down about? How pitiful, the Head of the Walt House.』

『Y-you may say it like that, but I've only just returned from Centralle. I was away from the territory a little too long this time around. So I thought I had made Maizel a little lonely, you see.』

He had prepared a present with that in mind, and yet for it to be denied… no, it looks like Maizel seriously didn't want it. There's no way Brod could've handed it over.

Grandma Zenoire spoke.

『You should've just handed it over first thing when you saw him. If you did, there'd be no need for you to be too mindful or anything. And it's your fault for loitering around Centralle. It's not as if Maizel hates you. He looks up to you strongly. You're the advisor to his majesty for Pete's sake.』

On the words, 'his majesty,' I felt a bit of annoyance from Zenoire's voice. This and that had happened between her and Bahnseim Royalty, so I'm sure she had much to think over.

Brod lowered his shoulders further.

『I see. So he looks up to me? Then I've got to try harder.』

『Dear! Put an end to this nonsense already. Pledging loyalty to

such a monarchy… if the Walt House had cooperated with my home, you'd have obtained an appropriate status by now.』

Looking up at Zenoire as she said such things, Brod spoke.

『… We hadn't even met back then. And my hands are already full with my current status. If you'll let me be honest, I think it'll be fine if Maizel's child or grandchild becomes a Marquis or Prince.』

While Brod usually carried himself boldly outside, it seems he was fatigued inside. Grandma Zenoire spoke.

『Have some more ambition! If you got serious, then even Bahnseim would be in the Walt House's hands by now! And with that, by Maizel or his son's generation, you could even get the continent together!』

Brod laughed.

『Zenoire, to be blunt… I'm completely uninterested in such a thing! As long as you're by my side, that's enough for me.』

He made a wonderful smile. As he proclaimed his lack of interest with such a smile, Grandma Zenoire began to cry out.

『It's the dream of my house! So why did this… when it comes to the Walt House, you're the strongest in Bahnseim, are you not!? Show some backbone! When I want to pull that vile fiend down from the throne, you went and became his damn advisor!!』

The Seventh touched a hand to his chin as he watched the scene. His expression was soft, and he looking nostalgically at Zenoire.

『If Zenoire was here, I'm sure she'd break into song and dance if you told her you were aiming to unify the continent. And wait, looking back, she's still as cute as ever.』

The one shouting was a woman perfectly fit to the Walt House's Precepts. Her appearance and form in order, she was definitely a beauty. But why are you calling her cute only after she starts shouting? If my harem members started crying out like that, I'm sure I'd have nothing on my mind besides how to flee the scene.

With all my might. With everything in my body, I'd run.

There, the Seventh's smile turned a little sorrowful.

『No, if she were here, she'd have to witness you and Maizel fight, huh. I guess that's no good after all.』

As I thought, he was mindful of my battle with my father. So I said to the Seventh.

"Seventh. No, grandpa…"

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When I opened my eyes, it was dark in Porter's loading tray.

I'm sure the mild cold I felt on my skin came from the windows Monica had opened to ventilate. It rapidly grew colder, and I could feel a cold air touch the other side of the blanket.

While sensing the heat robbed away from the inner side, I raised my torso to see Clara wrap the cooling blanket tighter around herself.

I thought it was quite cute.

"Oh, you're already awake. Having stolen away my job of awakening a damn chicken, I will not permit that sleepy mug of yours. Now lie back down. I'll sleep with you, and we can start the morning by surprising you awake!"

"What's with that troublesome waking? I'd prefer something normal. Each and every one of you… learn a bit from the automatons at Damien's place."

There, Monica turned towards me, stroking her twin tails in succession, and striking a pose with her hand on her hip. It was so excessive that watching was irritating.

“You’ve been deceived. If you think those three are normal, you’re way off. Just as the other deteriorated models, just how nasty do you think they are? The only one who can serve you with such devotion is I, Monica alone.”

“That’s definitely wrong.”

I carried out such a pointless conversation with this morning’s Monica. Feeling some sleepy tears on my face, I wiped my eyes with my left hand.

“Tears when you haven’t even yawned?”

Hearing that, I nodded.

“That’s right… I’m yawning.”

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… Before Maizel’s march, one of his men came up to him.

A message had arrived, and it seemed to contain some sort of important notice. Maizel called him close to hear out the report.

“What happened?”

His stance on horseback not changing, Maizel waited for the report without a shred of impatience.

“Yes! The unit that went out for recon discovered enemy forces near the border. Their numbers are seventy thousand. They outnumber us. They are already lying in wait, and the terrain will make it difficult to get the drop on them.”

Maizel nodded.

“So instead of inviting a siege, they came right out. Well, I’m sure that thing at least had the knowledge to be a feudal lord. But to

challenge me to a field battle… driving him out was right after all."

The one riding the horse beside Maizel was Beil. He was wearing his armor, with his helmet in his hands.

"Maizel-sama, do you intent to fight them upfront?"

Maizel's expression didn't change.

"If we cannot circle around, then the main force will proceed straight onwards. It will be easier than initiating a siege."

But only the main force couldn't circle around, and other small forces could take action. Or so the messenger knight informed him.

"Send the raid units around. The enemy may be on guard, but if they have any negligence, a surprise attack is possible. The Walt House vanguard can…"

"… Maizel-sama, could you leave that duty to me?"

The one who interrupted Maizel's words was a baron. Beil showed some discomfort as he glared at the old man, 【Jared Forxuz】. The man with thick streaks of grey through his long hair and beard was the current head of the Forxuz House.

Maizel quieted Beil with a hand before he could make an outburst.

"That's quite a rare sight, Jared-dono. As far as my memory goes, this is the first time you've said such a thing. Something on your mind?"

Unable to contain himself, Beil ignored Maizel's quieting gestures, sticking his mouth in.

"Maizel-sama, that man's daughter accompanies Lyle. He may have intentions to deceive us."

Normally, Beil was the Walt House's retainer. And Jared was a baron, a mid-tier feudal lord position that served under Bahnseim's royalty. If one had to say whose standing was higher, that would be Jared. But Jared himself didn't seem mindful of that.

This was one of the reasons they were called the Walt House's dogs; Jared treated Maizel as his only lord. That would usually be considered a considerably disrespectful attitude towards the monarchy.

"That is precisely why. My daughter Novem's talent in magic is a goddess-send, even within our line. I thought it best a person of the Forxuz House be the one to suppress her."

There, Maizel looked straight ahead a while, opening up some time before he answered.

"… We do not know where Novem is. Not even whether she's on the battlefield or not. We'll send you based on whether she's found or not."

"Yes."

As Jared lowered his head and abided Maizel's orders, Beil looked unsatisfied. To him, Maizel laughed a bit.

"Don't be so angry. It's a magic talent the Forxuz House recognizes. There's no doubt it's a threat. But in that case, it was a waste to make her that thing's fiancée. Jared-dono, if you can take her alive, you're free to do so. There's no necessity to kill her."

While Maizel was trying to be mindful in his own way, Jared refuted it.

"No, your tact is unnecessary. If we're to fight my daughter… fight Novem, we cannot stand to hold back. I recommend fighting with the intent to have her dead."

The surrounding knights looked a little surprised, but Maizel spoke as a representative of them.

"To such an extent? I'm surprised such a woman of talent chose to follow that thing. I hold responsibility for acknowledging their engagement. If she is discovered, I will report it to you, Jared-dono."

Novem's own father was considerably wary of her.

And the collision of two armies was drawing closer as they spoke.

Address

… At the Walt House camp, Maizel was giving an address.

“We number fifty thousand. On the other hand, our enemy has seventy thousand. Thinking of pure war-potential, I’m sure our enemy has twice our troops. But… what of it!?”

Raising up his right hand, Maizel wrung out his a voice atop the temporary stage.

“A mere rebel army. What’s more, they were only able to amass twice our numbers. The training we’ve built up, and our experience is the greatest in the continent! We need only kick down that gathering of weaklings, and raise a bloodbath of the fools who dared challenge us on the open plains!”

The knights and soldiers raised cheers at his address. Maizel did have enough charisma for that, but the greatest reason was his achievements.

Just as the other Walt Heads of history, Maizel had raised up numerous victories. From his first campaign to now, he had never lost once. When it came to losing on the battlefield, experiencing it once was enough to cause a great loss.

It was difficult to rise from there, and if you don’t keep winning, all will crumble. Within that environment, for Maizel who kept winning on, the Walt House’s name… and the morale of the Walt House army he’d trained up were high.

“We shall win this battle, and return triumphantly to Centralle! Earn your merits! Grasp fame in those hands! Money! And make a name for yourselves! The Walt House that’s fought through all manners of battlefields shall give you victory!”

While their enemy was Lyle, who hailed from the same Walt House, and was raised by its ancestors, such a thing was irrelevant to Maizel and his company.

What was important was to raise morale. An army of low spirit was frail.

And Maizel understood the enemy held the advantage in numbers and terrain. That's precisely why he had to raise morale in his address.

"Now, brave heroes… enjoy your battlefield!"

Spreading out his arms, wringing out his voice, Maizel was answered by the cheers of several tens of thousands…

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The Walt House army was close.

While we were lying in wait for them, I stood atop the provisional stage. It was early morning, the sun yet to rise, making for a radiant scene.

Within all that, I looked behind to see Eva lightly raising her hand and waving. I'm sure she was signaling that the preparations were ready. Or perhaps she was cheering me on.

When I gripped the Jewel, the Third let his voice out.

『… Now then, we can't give any advice beyond this point. It wouldn't be any fun if Maizel-kun threw us into a disarray, so Skill use ends here. Lyle… I pray you'll be able to hear our voice a next time. Well, there are no absolutes on the battlefield, but the same goes for both sides. Normally, you'd be doing this after some more preparations… no, any more is just complaints. Now raise some morale. Addresses are important.』

I let go of the Jewel, and spread out my arms. I spread them as if holding a giant plate, and behind me, Eva supported with her Skill 【Allmind Language】.

A Skill to deliver your voice across. It was a Skill fitting of a singer like Eva, but the girl in question didn't want to rely on Skills, so she rarely ever used it. It was really helping out my cause, though.

Even with a shoddy address, my voice would get across to my allies.

"… The strongest army of Bahnseim is upon us. The enemy numbers fifty thousand. Fifty thousand elites who've crossed countless battlefields."

Entering in with a talk to stir up their unease, I clenched my right hand to form a fist. And I swung my left hand from the inside outwards.

"But we are the same. We've continued our victories as well. There are many who've joined our cause. I'm sure you the ladies and gentlemen of Beim may feel insecure. But worry not. You need only ask your comrades from the alliance. Just how much victory I've brought! At times, I've overturned war potential ten times our own!"

It wasn't a lie. In the battle in Zayin, I rose to action with a hundred. After that, we were running from place to place, but in the end, we won and took back the country.

"I have never seen loss! I've continued to win! There are plenty here who stand as a testament to that fact. And the gentlemen of Bahnseim shall understand as they fight. I am strong. We are strong! We've fought enemies several times our size and continued to win!"

I've been avoiding battle on disadvantageous circumstance, but in the end I still won, so it wasn't a problem. I'm sure you could say we breached an enemy with a small force. Though never once had I actually fought a foe with more soldiers than us.

"This time our numbers are greater than our foe. To add to that, we have the locational advantage. Truly our enemies are powerful… however! Whether our enemy is the strongest Walt House of Bahnseim or not, we are the ones who shall win! As long as everyone does what they should, we can achieve victory! This battle

isn’t anything so difficult!”

Anyways… we can win, but don’t let your guard down. That was the level of address I gave. You can’t be too negligent. But you can’t let them think they’ll lose. So I made them think that victory was possible, but made them feel a sense of crisis that the difference was only a slight one.

It was something the Seventh taught me.

“By your work, I shall make the goddess of victory turn to you! If we can accomplish that, the title of the continent’s strongest is ours for the taking! Win and get everything in your hands!”

I heard the cheers. And I recalled the Seventh’s words.

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… Within the Jewel.

The Seventh was taking a journey through his memories.

A journey through Brod’s life, and a journey for Lyle to know his own father Maizel.

Young and overflowing with Talent, Maizel was surely a radiant existence, even from Brod’s eyes. There was no saying Brod had no talent himself. But when compared to Maizel, it couldn’t help but fall short.

Brod… perhaps it was precisely because he was the Seventh that it troubled him.

The First wouldn’t think anything of it.
The Second would frankly accept it.
The Third would rejoice.
The Fourth would’ve accepted it as well.
The Fifth may have handed down his title earlier.

The Sixth… would surely have bragged about it.

But Maizel's father was Brod. There was a small crevice between the two. With talent that he never thought to deeply about, Maizel couldn't understand that trench.

In the mansion courtyard, Brod spoke with Maizel.

『Maizel, I've gotten the guns together, but this is quite difficult. Even if I'm to use them in a unit, I would have to leave it to someone I can trust. While they have a high output, to make use of them, we'll need knowledge we've never taught before, and…』

The experience Brod build up. It was around the time he was to pass it to Maizel. Looking closely, the still-young form of Zell was there as well.

Lyle looked at Zell.

"… Old Zell."

He muttered. The Seventh looked at Lyle.

『I left one of our gun-equipped forces to Zell. He could handle a gun as well as me. Whenever I went hunting, I'd often take him along.』

At the end of the Seventh's nostalgic eyes was the sabre hung at Maizel's hip. But Maizel looked truly perplexed.

He tilted his head.

『Father, why are you so particular about the gun? Even with this house's scale, we cannot assemble very many gunner units. On top of costing money, you'll have to station proficient personnel to them. In that case, it would be more efficient to assemble a well-equipped cavalry.』

He seemed genuinely curious. Brod looked at him and cleared his throat.

『It's true it'll be a unit with some problems. But there's no doubt

when we properly implement it, the power it exhibits will be great. I was thinking of focusing on these sorts of units in the future. Especially when we have a line of elevation… wait, Maizel!』

As Brod hurriedly reached out his hand, Maizel had turned his back and began his way off.

『It's unneccessarry for me. And how many years do you think it will take to make practical use of the gun?』

Brod became frantic.

『N-no… it'll take some time, but making Magic Tools of them, we're slowly getting the numbers together.』

『If you make them Magic Tools, it will cost even more money. The maintenance will be an extraordinary amount as well. Even if they carry on to my generation, I'm sure it will be a small scale. While there's definitely some light to be found, its influence on the funding of other fields is simply too great.』

The Seventh sighed. And he explained to Lyle.

『… As I compensated for my own strength with the gun, that had become my weakness. Sure enough, for a knight with a bit of a name to him, hammering in a few rounds wouldn't have any effect. My Skills Box and Warp were necessary to make up for that flaw. I was delighted when the Skills manifested.』

Lyle looked at his father Maizel.

"… If I didn't notice, I wonder if that's how I would be. When I first fought Aria, I was making everyone angry."

『Hahaha, that's right. Yep, you're easier to get along with compared to back then. Well, it's not like Maizel was wrong. Even in your generation following my death, it would be hard to say they've been put to practical application. And…』

Lyle and the Seventh's eyes turned to Maizel. Maizel gave a tired reply.

『Father, my Skill is Anti-Skill. Meaning Magic Tools hold no meaning. There's no reason for me to fuss over the gun.』

Watching Maizel walk off, Brod made a conflicted expression…

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The main camp.

I climbed the watch tower and looked afar. To where we waited, I could see Bahnseim's army… with the Walt House's flag at the center approaching.

By the time they came into sight, they were already in formation as they leisurely grew closer.

To my side, Monica looked at our foe.

"Looks like a formation that focusses on offense. They plan to break through before we can surround them. No, perhaps they're to make a straight line for our main camp?"

In numbers, we were winning. In theory, we only had to surround and strike them down. But before the force driving the Walt House, that was a fool's errand.

The movable watch tower was carefully made sturdy. I spoke to Monica.

"Looks like our line was cut."

Around the stage the army came into sight, a light haze started to come down… was how it felt. I felt a slight irregularity in the flow of Mana, causing my line with Monica to sever itself. It was similar to the sensation when I forcibly used a Magic Tool.

Monica purposefully made a show of wiping a tear with her finger.

“For the line connecting me with the Chicken Dickwad to be severed… but our hearts are always connected, so it’ll be just fine, right!?”

She sent some fleeting glance as if requesting something for me, and as I remained silent, she repeated the line, “Our hearts are always connected, so it’ll be just fine, right!? Right!?” Her tears were gradually becoming real.

“That’s right. We’re connected. So you’ve got to properly keep watch. You won’t be able to move around too much this time around.”

Delighted as she was, Monica’s twin tails began bouncing up and down.

“Good grief! There’s no salvation for worthless chickens! Very well. I, Monica, shall show how useful I can be on watch. I shall prove that the one who serves you more than any is none other than I!”

She sounded gung ho about it, so I have an unmotivated reply of, “good luck with that,” as I leapt down from the tower. Issuing orders around, I headed for my tent.

“Baldoir’s on standby, right? Don’t let him come out until all the preparations are in order. We’re starting off with a flashy exchange of magics. We’ll show them how firm we stand to put them on guard. Tell the magicians to hurry and get ready.”

As I said that, the messengers ran off.

Novem walked over to me, leading a platoon of Valkyries. Clara was standing on Porter’s roof, looking into the distance. The other members weren’t here.

“Lyle-sama, I think I should go out onto the front lines. My father and brother should be there. In that case, the one who can properly take them on is…”

I looked at Novem as I waved my hand to the side.

“I know. But you see… when you say you’ll fight your family so

disinterestedly; I hate that attitude of yours."

There, Novem opened her eyes a little wider, bursting into laughter before long. It was a chuckle, a cute sort of laughter.

"Those words fit you nicely as well, Lyle-sama. But if you find it unpleasant, shall I make myself a little more sorrowful?"

"If it'll be a lie, then to hell with it. In my case, I don't think I can help it though. But for you, didn't it come to this because you tagged along with me? You can't persuade them?"

I asked if she could bring the Forxuz House over to our side, but Novem would only shake her head.

"My father will never betray Maizel-sama. It is just as low a probability of me betraying you. So the outcome will have to be settled on the battlefield. Even so, are you sure it's fine to station so many Valkyries with me?"

Turning around, Novem spoke as she looked at the Valkyrie platoon. I spoke as I stroked my hair.

"Because I can't move. Well, I treasure you, and… oh, looks like it's starting."

As I said that and looking in the direction of the enemy camp, lights were coming our way.

Our side deployed a magic shield, and as the sky was enveloped in a faint shade of yellow, the magic collided with it. It exploded, as smoke rose from a destroyed portion of the shield. Luckily our side didn't suffer any casualty.

The important points were heavily protected. In order to efficiently use our valuable knights and magicians, I had put some mind towards their placement.

"Then I shall be off."

"… Be careful."

“I’m sure you’ll have it harder than me, Lyle-sama.”

Saying that, Novem got on the move.

Looking at the sky, I say magic fired from our side towards the enemy camp. They deployed the same shield as us, blocking all of the magic. It looked like a pointless exchange, but the enemy was using such an action to search out any unrest or weak points in our side.

My father Maizel could get in the way of Skill use. More or less, when it came to the scale of an army, there would be people possessing special Skills. If you relied on such people, it felt possible for things to erupt into chaos all at once.

“It’s because of the Seventh. We can deal with them without crumbling. Now father… the fun is yet to come.”

Saying that, I glared at the enemy camp as they launched their second volley of magic.

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… At Maizel’s camp, those who gathered to see the enemy hadn’t collapsed were looking surprised.

Beil looked at the enemy movements.

“They seem quite calm. Based on our information, they gave the impression of an army specialized around Skills, but it doesn’t seem they’ve suffered from it.”

Seeing his allies block the magic fired by Lyle’s camp, Maizel laughed.

“If they crumbled from something like that, it would lose all the fun.”

There were many armies that relied on some sort of Skill. There were many using them as means of communication, or making use of people with Skills to conduct recon from afar. When moving an army of ten thousands, there would be a considerable number of people with Skills.

For that sake, when Maizel activated the initial stage of his Anti-Skill, there was a relatively large number of armies that would crumble. Armies that did not were those with a firm foundation.

“I don’t plan to waste any time. Continue closing the distance. March forward.”

The army began moving to cover the distance.

Lyle’s campe was the one in position, with stockades and such of trees in place. For that sake, they remained immobile, slowly waiting for their foe to arrive.

While there were flashy exchanges of magic, in truth, quite a plain battle was about to unfold…

First Show of Hands

The battlefield ruled by magic, contrary to its appearance it had a relatively plain start.

While each side shot flashy magic at one another, they each defended as the Walt House camp plainly closed in the distance.

On top of the intense sound of explosions, the smoke that rose was a spectacle that looked as if it would create a cloudy sky of its own. Neither side thought the victory would be settled with this magic exchange.

But they did think if they could cause some damage, or crumble the enemy formation with it, it would be quite an earning. The Skill my father held was Anti-Skill… a Skill that didn't let others use Skills. But at the same time, it was a double-edged sword.

Because it wouldn't let his allies use Skills either. So to speak to the contrary…

"For all its flashiness, it's quite a subdued buildup."

The one who said that from atop the watch tower was Monica, who wouldn't have much of a part this time. I looked at the Walt House closing the distance.

"It would be troublesome if they suddenly made a flashy approach. If Skills are cut off, isn't this just about what you get? Well, I'm sure they're putting on a show for our forces. Telling us that they can't use Skills either."

What Monica informed me of was the enemy deployment.

"… Report. The enemy has a cavalry at the vanguard. There are foot soldiers on both flanks, and archers stationed as well."

Hearing that, I spoke to a nearby runner.

"You heard her. Move our cavalry to the flanks."

“Yes sir!”

Watching the messenger run off, I muttered.

“… Now then, I’ll have to depend on Clara’s hard work.”

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… Receiving an order on the back lines, Clara used Porter to transport soldiers.

Leaving the large-scale Porters to the magicians with talent, it was possible to transport war potential all at once.

However, there weren’t too many large Porters. To match enemy deployment and restation troops, they could only carry it out to a certain extent.

The ability to move massive amounts of troops at once was Lyle’s camp’s strong point. In contrast to the old-model Porters the Walt House used, their side had the original Developer Lyle, alongside Damien and the craftsmen of South Beim.

Receiving the order, Clara boarded one of the large-scale Porters to operate it.

“We will commence transport of the cavalry. Please begin moving promptly. Match the timing to the enemy’s arrival.”

As a few Porter units began moving, the loading doors opened. One after the next, the knights boarded with their horses.

“Make sure to load your spears and equipment onto other Porters.”

While Clara wasn’t good at giving orders, she couldn’t quite go about without giving them. There weren’t any to be found better at operating Porter than she. Her adventurer life up to now had specialized her to operate the machines.

When she thought over how she could make herself useful, the answer was already clear.

(I have to give my thanks to Lianne-san. It's because my request went through that I can pull off the job given to me… thinking of it like that, Adele really is useless.)

Thinking of how she couldn't get along with Adele, Clara confirmed the surrounding work was complete before she began moving…

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The right flank.

In contrast to the enemy's offensive formation, coming out with a plan devoted to defense, Lyle's camp took a formation spread over a large area.

Under normal circumstance, Lyle's army had greater numbers, so they should have been able to fight advantageously with that formation… however, Aria stationed on the right flank watched the enemy approach as she complained in her helmet.

"No Skills, this is going to be rough."

Holding up her spear on her horse, Aria led a cavalry. There were stockades set up around, and it wouldn't be so easily to breach.

Commanding a similar force was Gracia leading soldiers of Galleria. The right flank's composition was centered on these two.

Equipped with black armor, Gracia lifted the visor of her helmet as she spoke to Aria.

"Sorry, but I can't fire off anything too flashy. It looks like Rearguard Skills are no good either."

Gracia had a Skill specialized to magic… a Rearguard Skill. She

could freely manipulate flames, and posed quite a threat. While she was reliable to have as an ally, her Skill had been sealed as well.

“Even so, if you can fight normally, I’ll give it a warm welcome. More importantly, are you sure it was alright to hand the commanding rights to me? By our standing…”

“… By our standing, the worthy one is you. That’s all. If I don’t have to see my own soldiers be crushed, I don’t mind following your command. Well, you’re the one who knows our soldiers and this army’s style better than me.”

Seeing Gracia so level-headed, Aria thought.

“You have my thanks.”

While that’s all she said…

(Why can’t she be that calm on a regular basis? When she’s in front of Lyle, she goes into a hot haste, and does strange… hah, let’s put that aside for now.)

Aria wanted her to show this level-headedness in places besides the battlefield as well…

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… The left flank.

Granted a few thousand soldiers, Miranda followed the left flank’s main force commander Maksim’s orders to attack the enemy’s flank.

The Walt House army had been added onto by forces of other territories, and it wasn’t as if they were all too powerful. For that sake, she had circled around with her forces to stab into the enemy’s weak point, but…

“These guys are surprisingly capable.”

Holding her daggers on horseback, as an enemy knight thrust his lance at her, she used the dagger in left hand to repel its tip to divert its direction before throwing her right hand's dagger into a gap in his armor… his neck.

Falling from his horse, the knight writhed around, while the horse raced off into the distance.

Looking around, with the enemy's resistance, she could see her own allies grow disheartened. Their surprise attack had failed, and Miranda wanted to somehow pull back her hesitant unit, but the enemy wouldn't allow it.

There, a knight of large build dismounted his horse, held up his halberd, and began waving it around.

"Rebel forces! Curse your ill fortune to have come out before the god damn lord Caslaade"

Gaha, gaha, laughed the single knight as he swung his halberd. Miranda's surrounding allies were being cut down by it. It seems his large build wasn't just for show.

"Is he leading the enemy raid force? I'm no good with these types."

Saying that, Miranda raced on her horse, reaching her free right hand into a bag hung on the horse. She took out a crossbow and pulled the trigger.

She shot aiming at his head, but Caslaade turned his left hand towards it and deployed a Magic Shield. While the arrow pierced through the shield, its momentum had long been killed, as it bounced off his armor.

"They've got people of this class littered all around."

Looking at the enemy that wasn't completely devoted to brute strength, Miranda put away the crossbow, and took out a short spear she wasn't accustomed to.

Caslaade shouted out.

“What conspicuous armor. And that slender frame… you’re a woman! Curse your ill fortune for stepping out onto the battlefield!”

Taking a grand stance with his halberd, he swung down with enough force to bisect her, horse and all. But Miranda laughed in her helmet.

“You sure like cursing people. But the accursed one is you.”

Caslaade’s halberd was kicked by May, who appeared to his side. To Miranda’s eyes, it looked as if she had suddenly manifested to send the halberd flying.

His weapon knocked out of his hand, Caslaade’s stance crumbled.

Follwing right into that, Miranda moved her short spear… with a gimmick added in. The spear’s tip shot out, and pierced into Caslaade’s abdomen.

As May landed on the ground, Marina was pummeling enemy soldiers around.

“Weren’t you in trouble back there?”

As May said that, Miranda took a dagger in her right hand.

“That’s right. So I’d appreciate your further assistance.”

But perhaps May wasn’t in peak form as she shook her head.

“Please cut me some slack. It’s somewhat noisy, and I can’t get any power into my body. More importantly, you’ve successfully agitated the enemy, so shouldn’t you pull back?”

As Caslaade had been struck down, the surrounding enemy soldiers were flustered. Miranda confirmed their movements.

“Retreat! Follow after me!”

As Miranda declared retreat, her allies parted from the enemy forces. But inside, she thought.

(I'd have liked to shave away at them a bit more, but any more is impossible, I guess.)

As she withdrew, she felt she couldn't be negligent with non-Walt House enemies as well…

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Battle began on both flanks before the rest, as unlike the Walt House, our center was stationed further back than our wings.

From the watch tower, I heard Monica's voice. She wrung out her voice over the battlefield.

"Battle has commenced on both flanks. The enemy is being held in place."

I couldn't tell the specifics from afar, but I was relieved it seemed to be going well. However…

"Our center vanguard has come into contact with the enemy. The flashy magic has ceased, but… we're being pushed back."

The center army was clashing with the enemy's elites, and being pushed back.

I looked over my allies.

"We anticipated it, but they really are making for a straight line. I hope our morale doesn't crumble first."

Before the first line of stockades was easily destroyed and breached, I immediately called for retreat, and gave orders to my allies to fight a defensive battle. By standing at a high point, I was making it clear our main camp was here, as I looked over our pressed forces.

"It's about time."

There, the line between me and Monica was restored.

Monica called in a large voice.

“They’re coming!”

Right after, the sound of bells came from the enemy forces. My father Maizel wasn’t just Skilled in sealing Skills.

“Even if we know beforehand, I’ve no ways to defend against it. For now, we’ll just have to endure.”

Thinking over it loathsomely, I watched their driving force suddenly increased as they breached another stockade. They entered into battle with allied forces. Their driving force was clearly brought about by some sort of Skill.

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… What Lyle recalled was his conversation with the Seventh.

“The tactic my father is best at? It isn’t just sealing Skills?”

『That’s right.』

The place he conversed with the Seventh was the room of memories in the Jewel. The courtyard of the Walt House mansion.

In it, Maizel was smiling as he discussed something with his wife Claire.

Lyle’s mother Claire was stroking her enlarged stomach.

『What Maizel specializes in is sealing enemy Skills, and attacking in their confusion. He can’t keep it up for too long. But what he can accomplish by cutting off Skills is…』

Understanding the Seventh’s implications, Lyle spoke the continuation.

“Making Skill use possible, and giving the signal to his allies alone. Does that really go well? It lets the other side use Skills as well.”

The Seventh and Lyle’s eyes were directed at the two basking in their delight. Within that, they continued a mismatched conversation.

『Well, from the enemy’s point of view, they’ve convinced themselves they’re Skills have been sealed. Even if they can use it temporarily, it would just be confusion right after they recovered from their initial confusion. Even if you know it’s going to happen, you can’t help but be flustered.』

The Seventh looked at the young, somewhat thorny Maizel’s happiness as he made a bit of a sorrowful face himself.

Lyle approached the side of his face, looking down a bit.

『Perhaps Maizel was right for not choosing the gun. With his Skill on and off like that, it would become complicated to give orders. In the case the guns were used as Magic Tools, there was a probability his Skill would interfere and cause them to discharge. Expensive guns would have been damaged every time.』

The Seventh gave a bitter smile, but it was as if he was telling it to himself. Lyle raised his face.

“At the stage where the enemy uses Skills, will it be possible to use them ourselves?”

『I won’t say it’s impossible, but it will be chaos. It that’s how it’s going to be, it’s best you train your forces to fight without Skills at all. You pass the message to a few of them, but… if you act in accordance with it, Maizel will naturally have some countermeasures up.』

Lyle let out a sigh.

“How troublesome.”

『But it’s not all trouble. For even if they get some force from using Skills, only a few elites will be using them, looking at his army as a

whole. Right after they've used their Skills, there'll be quite a few who's driving force backfires, leaving them isolated. Maizel seemed quite mindful of it.』

Hearing the Seventh's advice, Lyle was curious to see what sort of countermeasures Maizel had put up in the over-ten years since then…

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On the battlefield, through the temporary use of Skills, I could spot some units running amok.

When our allies on a defensive battle were growing faint of heart, some enemies had thrown apart their rank, and taken independent action. Mainly young knights, leaping out in lust of achievement.

When that happened, while a portion of the units had obtained a driving force from their Skills, they kept their station, or even began to retreat.

"… He has made countermeasures, but they aren't perfect. It seems my father is troubled by those reckless young knights as well."

It was impossible for all to go well on the battlefield. It wasn't just for us, the same could be said for our enemy. And my line with Monica was severed once more.

Monica cried out from the tower.

"How many times must you cut my bond with my chicken dickhead!? Goddaaamiittt!"

She was the same as always, but I looked at my allies and smiled a bit.

"… Even for elites, once they're isolated, the rest is easy."

When Skill use became impossible, there were some who found themselves stranded within our forces. They were surrounded and beat down.

I had given such orders to the commanders, and my father's first show of hand was successfully sealed.

And at the same time.

"Should I tell him thank you for undoing his restriction on Skills? Monica!"

Monica atop the watch tower immediately reported to me. The Valkyries around the battlefield aimed for this timing, and sent their reports one after the next. Meaning information immediately gathered in my hands.

"There are no problems on the right flank. However, the left flank is losing heart. There are signs that a powerful unit is stationed there. From the information, perhaps it is the Forxuz House's forces?"

I looked at Monica.

"Any contact with Novem?"

"Already done."

I looked at the left flank. With just my eyes, I couldn't tell the specifics, but if Novem had set out, then it would be fine. No, perhaps it wasn't fine at all.

Once Monica finished her report, she returned to her station.

I turned an eye to the enemy camp.

"A Fifth Generation style defensive war… I'll let you bear witness, father… messenger, throw out our reserve forces at once. The location is…"

Passing orders to a messenger, I sent reinforcements to only the parts that needed them of the places that needed them.

The Eighth Generation Head

… The first day.

On that battlefield where tens of thousands of men clashed, as the day drew to a close, the battle was resolved with the Walt House's withdrawal.

All the main members were gathered in the Walt House tent, as they held a meeting. But while the Walt Army had put out casualties that couldn't be called small, they did not seem flustered.

Maizel looked over the faces gathered.

"Now then, this has been proof enough Lyle holds the gem passed down for generations, and is able to use it. The First through Third's Skills are full of fault, but Fourth through Seventh will be more troublesome than anything on the battlefield."

In a battlefield of restricted Skills, for someone not to crumble upon experiencing it the first time, Lyle was the first Maizel had ever seen. But that wasn't any reason for panic.

Beil gave his report.

"The units of second and third sons impatient for merits projected out, and have come out with numerous casualties. It isn't low, but it is still within the realm of our expectations."

Casualties came out. That meant that humans had died. However, the gathered members didn't seem inclined to brood over it.

Maizel spoke a little sorrowfully.

"Sons unable to succeed their houses see dreams of gaining achievements on the battlefield to stand on their own feet. There's no helping they be reckless. But it wasn't a waste. With their bodies, they have proven that Lyle can handle the gem."

Jared gave a report.

“Maizel-sama, Novem’s form was confirmed on the right flank. But I have not properly clashed with her. The enemy is matching our formation, moving units around at will. It has been determined their rear support is more capable than ours.”

Beil agreed to that.

“The left flank was the same. When it was supposed to be a field battle, they focused on defense, and prepared stockades. It felt as if we were in a siege. The disadvantage of numbers is a great one.”

Hearing that, Maizel nodded… and laughed.

“Well then, I gave them a chance to earn their stripes. With this, the young’uns should keep quiet for a bit. And showing them a bit of pain will firm their spirits. Because it’s been nothing but one-sided battles to this point.”

One of the vassal knights offered Maizel some advice.

“There is a feudal lord who suffered heavy casualty on the right flank. He should retreat. And if you’ll let me have my say as a Walt House vassal, if you keep us stationed on the back lines forever, our members will eventually…”

“I know. Now then, we’ve gotten the chance to learn the troublesome ones. Let’s get our battle array in order.”

Like that, Maizel’s group conducted a discussion about the following day…

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“They are concentrating on our right flank.”

Hearing Monica’s voice from the watch tower, I was able to know why the left flank didn’t seem particularly pressed.

“So they’ll attack from the right. Send reinforcements. Even so, we’re winning in numbers over there. If they do something like that, the result should be…”

Numerical advantage. Terrain advantage. In regards to the advantages we held, my father had decided to concentrate on the right flank.

There was some leisure in the left and center, giving us some reserve force. At the very least, the enemies in the centers’ quality of equipment was falling short of yesterdays’. What’s more, they weren’t assertively attacking. When I came to the decisions to send reinforcements, I ordered a messenger at once.

“… Does he plan to take the right flank first?”

As we had fortified ourselves in our position for defense, we had a fault such that we couldn’t easily change our formation. For that sake, we were specialized in stopping the enemy’s advance, but our means of offense were lowered. In order to compensate for that, we constantly held reserve forces to send around, but…

At that moment, Monica reported the movements of the center.

“The enemy has retreated. But, this is… they’re scattering and dispersing.”

Just a glance, and it seemed the enemy was blatantly trying to lure us in.

“Ignore it. Right now, we need to reinforce the right…”

But before anyone could hear my verdict, the unit before my eyes jumped out of their own accord. It was as if our positions had been reversed from yesterday.

“… The vanguard has crossed over the stockades, and gone on the offense.”

“Why… what is General Blois doing?”

But the units nearby the general hadn’t moved. A portion had taken

independent action. And following suit, a few more had followed along.

I immediately sent a messenger to tell them to pull back, but immediately following, another messenger raced over.

“A portion of the units have ignored orders, going AWOL and beginning pursuit of the enemy! They have ignored General Blois’ command, and crossed the stockades! General Blois has put in an urgent request for reinforcements…”

Facing the messenger, I issued out some irritated orders.

“I’ll send them! Tell them to endure until then!”

Looking closely, the enemy’s lightweight equipment implied they had formed with running as the premise. When I thought they had concentrated on the right flank, their scattered and dispersed soldiers cleanly regroup and assailed our soldiers coming at them.

In order to help them, some more units leapt out of the center.

“What are they doing!?”

With enemy and ally in such disarray, support through magic and arrow was impossible. Simultaneously, they were taught the difference in drilling between our forces. While they had the shape together, what they had built up was different.

“The enemy has pulled out of the right flank. They have begun an advance towards the center.”

“Kuh! Will reinforcements make it in time?”

At that moment, a large magic flash of light came from the left flank.

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… At the left flank, the enemy's substance was different from the day before.

With the enemy forces centered around the Forxuz House' army, their magic attacks had become something severe.

Lyle's camp had taken a defensive formation, but even so, the enemy had become even more aggressive than before.

Novem was protected by surrounding Valkyries, as she held up her staff and activated her magic.

"Block it."

With nothing but words, a pale yellow light appeared before her allies on the left flank to form a shield.

But they had concentrated their magic on only one place, to make sure Novem was nailed to the spot.

Because of that, in another part, the enemy had breached the stockades and infiltrated. As Maksim and Miranda, as well as May and Marina were there, they hadn't crumbled. But it was an extremely harsh situation.

For their allies were prepared to flee.

The especially terrible ones were the soldiers they took in. Rather than the Bahnseimian soldiers, the main problem was the number of soldiers from Beim on the left flank.

"When we're outnumbering them here."

As Novem muttered that, a unit that had a magic shield deployed started an attack aimed at her.

"… He's here."

Looking at her foe, she was able to confirm the form of her brother who'd delivered her staff, 【Elbert Forxuz】.

As Novem had to keep her shield up, preventing her from using

magic, the Valkyries produced guns from their binders and began their own attack.

However, the bullets were completely blocked by the shield Elbert had deployed. Rounds bounced off, and the attacking cavalry began to accelerate with the stockades before them.

The accelerating horses destroyed the stockades as the magic shield rammed into it. What brute force… Novem thought, as the Valkyries moved to action. Taking weapons in hand, they set themselves on the enemies that were focused on Novem.

Elbert jumped down from his force, landing before Novem with a hint of flight.

“How long it has been, oh little sister of mine!”

Her brother with his long brown hair tied behind was in full body armor, his hand clenched around a sword. He cut at Novem, but she parried it with the staff in her right hand.

“It’s been a while, dear brother. If you’re here, that means this offensive is father? As I thought, his bad habits are coming out. The timing is too easy to read.”

Seeing Novem’s expression fail to change in the slightest, Elbert started to sweat.

“Don’t think bad of us. Just as you’ve sworn loyalty to Lyle-sama, we’ve sworn our own to Maizel-sama.”

Novem gave a light nod, turning her left hand to her brother…

“I understand. So I’ll try to make it painless. Now disappear.”

… She shot her magic, sending him flying through the air.

Elbert had immediately deployed magic shield, making it so he got out just with being shot backwards. He looked around. Around, he should have been able to see his guard knights fighting the Valkyries.

But the Valkyries had pulled them down from their horses, and stuck in the finishing blows.

"… They're not human. But if that's how it is!"

Wary of the Valkyries, Elbert raised his left hand high. Enemy knights gathered around him. Novem showed not the slightest quiver, and to protect her, the Valkyries stood up front, deploying their wing-like binders out front like shields.

With Elbert at the center, a storm of fire swelled up, brushing the surrounding stockades to oblivion.

Immediately following, a large-scale magic rained down aimed on Novem, to which he added his fire to raise a violent explosion.

"Did that get her?"

As Elbert said that, he looked at the tattered Valkyries around. While their bodies were torn up in all sorts of ways, the skeletal structures remained. As they had been constructed of sturdy materials, they were able to escape with that extent of damage.

And Novem was where she stood, completely unharmed. Elbert looked at Novem, and made a bit of a fed-up face.

"… These children were quite precious you know. Lyle-sama went as far as to assign them to guard me."

Having deployed a magic shield so there wouldn't be any surrounding casualties, Novem looked tiredly over the Valkyries littering the ground. She returned her eyes to her brother.

Elbert smiled a bit.

"Father and I have nothing greater than that to offer. That was an attack great enough to blow away the right flank in its entirety. As I thought, you really are outside the norm… everyone retreat."

Watching Elbert's tired expression, Novem held up her staff in her right hand.

“It was a splendid attack. However, don’t think I’ll let you get away.”

Blocking that joint attack of Jared and Elbert, Novem had also contained ally casualties. But the battlefield was inclining a harsh direction for Lyle’s army…

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Night. I held a meeting in the tent.

“Gosh, our position from yesterday was totally reversed. Having crushed the enemy’s outliers on the first day, one of our units got a little stuck up and leapt out.”

General Blois gave his report as if it were a joke, but his expression was worn out. Saying they couldn’t abandon their allies, it seems it was a situation where the commanders in charge weren’t able to give out any decent orders.

Military regulations exist for things like this, but the difference between the regulations each part of our army learned was becoming blatant here.

Within the tent, I gathered out main members and confirmed the casualty count as I muttered

“… Station our reserve forces at the vanguard. Send the injured soldiers to the back lines.”

General Blois looked over the units he’d be sending back.

“That’s a bit much, but there’s no helping it.”

As Blois said, they had grown lax over their victory on the first day. I should’ve straightened them out.

Eva made a tired expression as she spoke.

“Give me a break. On top of rushing out of their own accord, we got injury after injury trying to save them. There are plenty with their dissatisfactions. How about some punishment?”

With allies about to die before their eyes, ignoring it would lower morale. The reason some jumped out driven in their righteous indignation was to save their allies. And in the case they were unable to save them, their complaints would turn to their other comrades.

To me and General Blois, that is. And once they calmed down, their next dissatisfaction would go towards the unit that jumped out. I really want to ask just what they were thinking.

“I’ll have them sent back, and punish the commanders. That’s disregarding orders, and acting beyond authority. Well, I’ll prepare a chance for them to redeem themselves, though.”

Eva still looked unsatisfied. Just as she ought to. In order to save them, deaths had come out in Eva’s unit.

They were war deaths that would originally have been avoided.

“That’s not enough.”

And Elza- also in attendance- looked unsatisfied as well. At first, she was stationed on the left flank, but with a change of battle array, I had her take Novem’s position at the center. Of course, looking back at how things were going today, perhaps it would’ve just been best if I kept her on the left from the start.

“It was a clear invitation. Yet there were fools unable to see through it… Beim’s soldiers truly are weak.”

Elza’s unit had attacked and rescued as well. But she had managed to keep casualties down, and you couldn’t say she suffered anything too severe.

General Blois shrugged.

“It would be harsh to compare them to those that go through the everyday wars of Rusworth and Galleria. Well, the responsibility’s

mine either way."

I sighed.

"… It's also my responsibility for not straightening them out on the first day. I couldn't see through the enemy's objective."

There, General Blois shook his head.

"I wonder. From their point of view, if the center didn't crumble like that, they would have simply continued concentrating on the right flank. Even so, the explosion on the left flank was a surprise. It seems the casualty count was low, but to be honest, a chill ran through me."

"… let's move the right flank back."

Hearing my words, Blois' expression turned serious.

"That would put the center up front. But originally, we'd hold them in place a few days to bleed them out more."

Moving both sides back was part of the original plan.

And I stood as I spoke.

"Let's have our engineers work on strengthening the stockades at night. From tomorrow, the center's going to be the harshest war ground, after all."

This battle was already forcing itself into its midst.

First Joint Effort

“The right wing of the center will pull back. I believe it best you withdraw the left as well.”

Listening to Monica’s voice, I watched our allies desperately enduring at the front. The center under General Blois was solid. But its armies… its right and left were crumbling.

On top of the Walt House’s harsh attacks, they showed their tenaciousness as quite a plain battle continued on. I had stationed the left and right flanks further back, continuing the war with the center protruding out, and we were already entering our tenth day.

It was a rare sight on an open field battle, but in a sense, the situation was as if we were carrying out a siege. We could only endure.

“Send out a messenger. Have them pull back, and send the injured to the rear.”

The units and soldiers recalled to the back would be reorganized. Even if we kept sending reinforcements, we got more injured than usable forces coming back.

Monica turned to me and spoke.

“… Chicken dickwad, I recommend retreat. It is my belief any more is impossible.”

I clenched my fist.

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… The Walt House camp.

Nearby the tents, Maizel watched over the battlefield. It looked as if

the war was largely turning in his favor.

Even if reinforcements continued to come from the enemy's back lines, they were sending even more enemies back, so running out of strength was only a matter of time.

Yet Maizel seemed somewhat unpleased.

"How strange. I can't feel the same level of resistance as on the first day."

As he sat in a chair and muttered, Beil- who also served the role of his adjutant- gave his take.

"Is it not because we largely sliced away their fighting spirit on the second day? And the Forxuz House is fighting amongst itself on the right flank. It's a flashy exchange with many having to pull out. They've also pulled back their left flank, making their center project outwards."

Maizel nodded.

"In a sense, they've got a fortress. In order to keep it up, they're having difficulty with changing formation. So they've lost control of their movements. I know that, but I can't help but get caught up on something."

Changing formation to fit the situation as they fought, an army that moved precisely to Maizel's orders. Bahnseim's strongest wasn't just for show; the army moved as if it were a single living thing.

For that sake, everyone could see victory was approaching. And while everyone could see it, Maizel felt something was off. If the Forxuz House's Jared were here, perhaps he'd be able to give advice, but at present he was fighting his own daughter on the right flank, unable to leave the battlefield.

Beil felt his dissatisfactions.

"While it's true one of our detached forces was crushed by the enemy, looking at the whole, it's but a minor problem. If we continue pushing the enemy, they'll have to leave the lands that

built for themselves. If it gets into a battle of pursuit, victory will be a simple matter, won't it?"

Maizel touched a hand to his chin as he nodded.

(That's right. That's how it should be. But after reading our hand so thoroughly on the first day and dealing with us so, the way they're battling… having soldiers fight by your orders is definitely a difficult thing, but if that was the case, they would've crumbled sooner.)

On the sensation it was more like attacking an enemy fort than a plain battle, Maizel recalled his father's face.

(… Come to think of it, when it came to bringing down castles and fortresses, there wasn't anyone better than my old man.)

Why at this point… did he recall his father? Maizel felt just a little curious…

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Night.

Watching my army as it began its retreat, I looked up at the night sky.

Eva approached me.

"Sorry to interrupt while you're busy stargazing, but I've some things to report. I'm not sure if they were a raid force or recon, but we turned something back."

Eva was an elf, her legs much stronger than the average soldier. What's more, she led the dark elves, and those dark elves were a tribe that lived in the forest. On top of being strong in the dark of night, they specialized in jobs that required them to be swift on their feet.

“… Sorry. I pushed such tedious work onto you.”

“It’s fine. I’m demanding collateral. For the dark elves assisting us as well, rather than doing it for you, they’re doing it for their own sakes.”

I laughed a bit.

“Well, if that wasn’t the case, it would be contrarily suspicious. The forests around South Beim, right? If they’re going to manage it properly, they can have it for all I care. But that can’t grow too unsociable.”

Eva shrugged her shoulders, staring fixatedly at me.

“In this era, we can’t make a living by holing ourselves up. South Beim’s close, and they’ll need some intermingling. But are you sure? Thinking of South Beim’s best interest, it would be best to clear away those forests for access to the watering hole and such, or so Adele said.”

According to Adele-san, if we were going to give the elves a forest, we were better off finding another one. There was a possibility they’d impede the development of South Beim, was the reason apparently.

From my point of view, slowing South Beim was a necessity.

“It’s fine. Looking at Beim alone it’s a problem, but looking at the continent as a whole, it’s a necessity. And I’m a man who honors my promises.”

Eva, upon hearing my words.

“But you only make promises you can honor, right? Well, then so be it. It seems the chief was worried about it, so I just had to ask.”

Everyone took action in pursuit of their own profit. I won’t say that’s bad. But when it comes to using people, you would have to know what the other party sought after.

If I didn’t aim for emperor or anything grand like that, I’m sure I

wouldn't have to mull my head over such things. However, there was no turning back.

"… Eva, do you have a moment?"

"What is it? I'm on break, so go ahead."

I turned to her and spoke.

"I want to talk a bit about the Seventh Generation Head… Brod Walt. I'm supposed to give you some info for your songs."

When I said that with a smile, Eva laughed a bit. Rather than reluctant, she looked interested. It seems she thought I would just be bragging about my ancestors at first, but listening to the good and bad of my ancestors, Eva seemed to enjoy it quite a bit.

"Why not? I'll complete it for you one day. But in that case, that leaves… your father who we're fighting, and the third person, right?"

I nodded.

"Yeah, that's right. I'll tell you about the Third next time."

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… It was the day Lyle headed for the battlefield.

The scene projected in the Seventh's room of memories was one of Maizel and Claire holding a child. Claire was making a tired expression, but she looked delighted. Maizel had bags forming under his eyes.

『You did well, Claire! It's a boy!』

Maizel rejoiced. And Claire was the same. That's just how much meaning there was behind birthing a boy.

『Yes! As long as this child grows up safely… ah, truly, thank you for being born, Lyle.』

Lyle… it was a scene of when he was born. An elderly Brod and Zenoire were at the scene, deeply moved as well.

『M-my grandson. For him to turn out so cute… B-but my grandson is still a child of the Walt House! We must raise him strictly!』

『… Dear, when you've already bought so much for the child, you have absolutely no persuasive power. What was it again? Enough clothes and toys to get him passed three? Those are things you're supposed to purchase after discussing it with the family.』

『Zenoire, don't be so angry. See, when I just happened to stop by Centralle, they just happened to be on sale.』

『… The merchants caught wind of the fact you were going to have a grandson, and made sure to catch your attention! You fell for it, hook line and sinker.』

As Brod and Zenoire conversed, perhaps Maizel hadn't gotten a wink of sleep to that point, as he collapsed on the spot. The attendants in the room and Brod were quite flustered.

『Maizel! Get a grip on yourself!』

As Brod grabbed his shoulders and violently shook him back and forth, Zenoire hit him on the back of the head.

『You're the one who needs to calm down! What are you doing to my Maizel… carry him to his room at once.』

Claire panicked with the baby in her hands, while the young boy held tight merely gave a small yawn.

Lyle looked at the scene, giving a bit of a sorrowful smile.

"Thinking back on it now, it's a little surprising. There was a time like that, you know."

There the Seventh snapped his fingers. Following that, the

surrounding scenery faded to gray, and changed to show a different scene.

It was the Walt House mansion, with a small Lyle running about. Around him were some boorish knights, and…

『Please wait, young master!』

As Lyle ran around all smiles, the maids and knights gave chase. There, a still-young Beil grabbed the boy, and held him in his arms.

『Lyle, you can't go around troubling everyone.』

『Baywoo!』

『Ahahaha, it's Beil, Lyle-sama.』

He had a lisp. But thinking of how he was a child that hadn't even turned two, being able to run around like that was something amazing. The Seventh laughed as he spoke to Lyle.

『Back then, you matured real fast. You energetically raced around, and full of curiosity, you'd try looking all around the mansion.』

As Lyle looked a little awkward, he gazed about a little sorrowfully. The people of the mansion were all directing smiles at him.

『… Back when I was alive, you were definitely our heir. Everyone was counting on it. And you had it in you to answer their expectations.』

The Seventh turned to Lyle.

『Now then, Lyle… on to the main subject.』

As the two faced one another, time stopped for the surrounding scenes, as they turned gray and crumbled to dust…

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… The next day.

“Enemy forces have abandoned their camp, and begun their flight!”

Jumping to his feet on the messenger’s words, Maizel immediately strapped on his equipment as he issued our orders.

“Prepare to give chase! I was negligent. I never thought they’d flee in the night… but as long as we can press them all the way to Rhuvenns, it isn’t a problem… no wait!”

After his men hurriedly outfitted him with his armor, a fully-prepared Maizel left to the outsides of the tent.

His subordinates hurriedly gathered before him.

“Maizel-sama, the enemy has yet to fully run away.”

As Beil approached to report, Maizel cried out.

“Ready my horse. Put all of our forces on pursuit.”

“B-but…! Maizel-sama, you don’t have to give chase yourself.”

He refuted Beil’s words.

“You’ve seen how thorough our foe can be. Once they return to their territory, they may strengthen their defense. We can’t follow them into dangerous waters. I don’t think we’ll lose, but it will increase our casualties. We’ll chase them partially, and withdraw after that.”

Judging that any more would be dangerous, Maizel believed that Lyle favored formations that leaned towards the defensive. In truth, when fighting him, he rarely took up an offensive stance. In that case, perhaps he had considerable preparations set up in Rhuvenns’ territory.

“If he gets too far away for my Skill to be effective, our own standing may become doubtful. Don’t forget the enemy was reported to be specialized in Skills. Don’t worry, we’ll just lightly hit them around a bit. I leave my guard to you.”

“Yes sir!”

Under Maizel’s orders, the army moved to pursue. Maizel mounted his readied horse, entered the advance party headed towards the enemy camp, destroying stockades along the way. Without putting up any resistance, those defensive walls of boards were burned away.

And the Walt Army began its chase. Breaching the fortress, what their units found was an enemy unit in the midst of its flight.

Seeing a portion of fleeing forces from afar, they began moving in that direction. Luckily, there weren’t any side roads or shortcuts, so the commanders concluded they weren’t a lure, and continued the army on.

Maizel proceeded onwards surrounded by guards.

But.

“This is strange.”

Maizel muttered as he looked around. This gradually contracting path something purposely prepared. On top of that, he could barely feel any tragic sentiment from the fleeing enemy.

Turning to Beil, Maizel spoke.

“We’re turning back. Proceeding on is dangerous. And erect a magic shield.”

It was the moment Beil was about to issue orders. Gunpowder ignited, letting off quite a nostalgic sound. That sound that shook the air brought memory of his father Brod. What’s more, the explosion had come from behind them.

“What happened!”

As Maizel turned, it seems his allies couldn’t maintain control of their horses, as they weren’t stopping. But if they didn’t stop and change direction, they would be defeated. Finally turning around, what came into his sight were two units encamped on areas of light

elevation, discharging their guns towards them.

“Guns, you say!?”

As Maizel shouted out, Beil cried out as well.

“Maizel-sama, be careful… they even brought cannons out!”

“And cannons? Why are we unable to block something of that level!?”

There wasn’t anyone who could answer Maizel’s question.

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… The units that hid.

Those two units were positioned to pincer the path the enemy would treat. They had fired their guns for their lines of fire to intersect.

So as not to hit any allies, and to immobilize their enemies. While there was a magic shield put up, they added on the attacks of the cannons and improved guns brought in from Beim. What’s more, with sheer numbers, it was a rain of bullets.

The enemy gradually became less capable of defending against it, their casualties slowly rising.

Commanding one of the units was the happily married Alette.

Borrowing some forces from Lyle, and receiving instruction from her husband Baldoir, she took command of a firearm unit.

“Did you see that, soldiers of Bahnseim!? This is my and m… my husband’s…! Our first joint effort!”

The unit’s adjutant sighed by her side. He was a yeoman Baldoir had brought from the Randbergh House, who had splendidly

become a knight in this endeavor. The reason such a man was stationed by Alette, was because she had become the bride of his master.

“Milady, there are loads of soldiers in this unit who hail from Bahnseim, so please watch your words.”

“I-I’m sorry! N-no, that wasn’t my intent.”

The adjutant shook his head, before directing his eyes forward again.

“We’ve managed to divide them well. The horses of their cavalry have been startled, and it doesn’t look like they’ll be listening. Unable to make a sudden stop, they’re pressing on ahead.”

Alette made a purposeful clearing of her throat as she corrected her posture.

“That’s right. Just as planned. The enemy had been neglecting guns and cannons. So we used that to pincer…”

“Wrong. If we don’t use them well, they won’t show any effect. Even now, we weren’t able to defeat as many foes as expected.”

They had a magic shield up, so they weren’t able to damage their enemy as much as anticipated. But it was a huge success as a surprise attack. The chaotic Walt Army gradually began to recover, as it began dispatching soldiers towards Alette and Baldoir’s units.

“They’re coming!”

As Alette pulled her sword, a mounted Elza leaned her staff against her shoulder as she spoke.

“You all continue your attacks. We won’t let the enemy get any closer.”

On the other side, Gracia was protecting Baldoir. And that was most convenient for Lyle’s camp.

As the forces split and the cavalry protruded out, the main force led

by Lyle was going to try and attack.

Elza spoke.

“We’re going to keep splitting up the enemy. As long as we can take the general’s head, this battle will be our victory. And… I won’t let them get in Lyle’s way. Now let’s get on with it.”

As Elza turned her staff towards the oncoming enemies, arrows of ice began to manifest around her. Their numbers exceeded several hundreds, and when they shot all at once towards the approaching enemy, they pierced the magic shield, and fell foe after foe.

Lyle’s counterattack had begun…

Father and Son

The sound of gunshots and cannons rang through the battlefield.

It was a plan to divide the enemy, and with the use of Skills restricted, that was the greatest possible use I could muster for those guns with their meager firepower.

“Divide the enemy. Use the sounds to throw off the horses… I see, perhaps saving them away for this time was the right answer. Well, if we had them, we’d have been able to hold the enemy back some more in our defense.”

General Blois nearby shrugged his shoulders as he said it. But it’s not as if there weren’t any faults. I mean…

“Rejected. Having gained funds from Beim, even with so many craftsmen under our arms, there’s a limit to how much guns we can maintain and supply ammunition for. Rather… if I wasn’t able to obtain them in Beim, I’d definitely never use these means. Because of their limits, I can only use them at the best timing.”

Even each ammunition rounds had to be made one by one by the craftsmen, and even if we had the money, we wouldn’t be able to have enough made. The reason my father didn’t choose the gun was surely because they were no good if you thought over the battlefield. But if you looked at the internal front as a feudal lord, they were a valid option.

The divided and confused pursuit unit before me, I lightly pat May’s neck. She was in her quilin form with a harness over her back, ready to go at any moment.

If I turned around, I’d see my enemy I purposely had retreat. Showing the enemy we had retreated, I had changed the location of the battlefield.

Normally, they’d doubt it, but the enemy was a group taking the name of the strongest. They were used to their own victories and the enemy’s retreats.

… I have to be careful too.

“Now then, prepare for our assault. Looking at war potential, there’s no doubt we’re the superior. While they’re still dispersed… we’re taking Maizel Walt’s head!”

As I pulled my Katana and held it high, the surrounding voices answered in cheers. Mounting May’s back, I took the head of the unit and got in position for the assault.

General Blois made a troubled expression.

“I would rather not have the supreme commander go out on the front lines. I’m sure you already have enough fame.”

I pulled down my helmet as I spoke to the general.

“It’s because I have something I want to say… I won’t concede this place to anyone.”

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… … Maizel grit his teeth as he watched his rear lines unable to keep up.

(He got me! For him to be able to prepare so many guns and cannons! For him to…)

The practical problem lay in that Maizel had never experienced the might of Beim. Beim, that had grown so large even Lyle and the ancestors felt a sense of danger from it… its productivity was beyond his expectations.

On top of that, while Lyle had destroyed Beim once, he had secured its funds and craftsmen, using a majority of their power to prepare for battle.

He had put hands into a usually impossible measure to prepare for

victory. Maizel had been making light of Lyle.

“Maizel-sama!”

Beil gathered the surrounding knights and soldiers, trying to regain their formation, but hearing a tremor and looking about, he noticed the enemy starting their attack and cried out.

Maizel pulled his sabre and directed his voice at Beil.

“… We shall not surrender. We’ll tear through them here; aim for Lyle’s neck!”

Beil headed for the other knights.

“You heard the man! Show them the backbone of the Walt House’s elites! Offense formation!”

As Maizel’s divided and lessened unit looked as if it was going to be surrounded, they set their sights on the place the enemy seemed most numerous. Because a flag presumably belonging to Lyle was hung there.

Maizel turned his sabre’s blade forward…

“Splendid work driving me so far. You have my praise. But I’ll definitely take your head! … Charge!”

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My father’s surrounded unit regained its formation and began its own assault.

Riding on May’s back, I watched it as I issued out orders. I had Aria and Miranda on the flanks, with numerous elites at the front. The Valkyries were mounted, with Units One, Two and Three guarding me.

“A frontal attack. Fitting of father, I guess? Well, I knew it would come to this!”

As I drew my Katana and we clashed straight up with the enemy, our unit had a magic shield up. The enemy had deployed one as well, meaning magic, arrows and bullets were rendered meaningless. Our armies collided, I lightly hit my foot against May’s stomach.

“We’re going to the front, right? Are you sure? I really will go, you know.”

“Don’t worry about it! We don’t have the time to hold back!”

What May worried for wasn’t me getting serious. The ones before us were elites of the Walt House. Meaning there would be people I knew.

“… Then I’ll take you to your papa!”

As May raced forward, she left the other forces, as she leapt to the lead. I was gripping the reins with my left hand, but it felt as if I’d be shaken off. With such acceleration, May sprouted a horn from her forehead to discharge electricity. As the discharge interfered with the magic shield and a protective wall of lightning was formed, I looked at the enemy knights before my eyes.

“…! Trample them down!”

I can’t say I didn’t hesitate. For I had seen them. The Walt House soldiers, knights and servants who had rejoiced at my birth.

In the Seventh’s memory, everyone was truly laughing. But now they were enemies, and I didn’t have the means to free them.

Clad in lightning, our unit collided with the enemy… and they were shot back.

While she was usually going around eating and sleeping, as expected of a quilin. If a quilin was heading the assault, we wouldn’t be brushed away so easily.

If she applied herself like this on a regular basis, or so it's probably best I don't mention.

May spotted something.

"Lyle!"

At the end of her sights… there, I confirmed my father.

"Aria, Miranda… make sure no one gets in the way. Use the Valkyries however you want!"

May raced on, I cut down the incoming knights with the Katana. Their armor cut through, the knights fell from their horses. Without looking back, I continued straight for my father, the surrounding enemy troops flocking around me.

But…

"I won't let them!"

Miranda came out front, taking on a knight. And…

"You're in the way!!"

Swinging around her spear on horseback, Aria trampled and scattered knights and soldiers in the truest sense as she prepared a path. They were being supported by the Valkyries.

While May galloped down the opened path, I jumped down and lowered my Katana at my father.

Parrying it with his sabre, his stance crumbled as he fell from his forth. But he immediately rolled to his feet, stood, and took his stance. Looking at his left hand, I could see the wind blowing and distorting around it.

"Coming out before me, I'm being looked down on here. But you've saved me some time."

That nostalgic voice was as cold as I expected. It wasn't one to direct at one's son. Frigid all the way through, he was looking at me

as nothing but an enemy.

Taking a stance, I similarly prepared lightning in my left hand.

“It’s been a while, father. No, Maizel Walt.”

“… Disgrace of the Walt House. You should’ve just died in a ditch somewhere!”

As my father took a step in, Beil on his horse cried out.

“Maizel-sama! Someone help Maizel-sama!”

But Aria rushed out before him. Pulling her from the right to the center, there was a meaning behind taking her to such a place.

“I won’t let you get in the way!”

She swung her spear to stop his great sword. Our allies were catching up around, the number of hindrances slowly going down.

“Aren’t you embarrassed, being protected by a woman!? You washout!”

Turning his left hand to me, a mass of condensed air headed for me. I immediately ran to the side to avoid it, but my father had beat me there, thrusting out his sabre. Its blade was full of ill will.

When I parried it with my Katana, sparks ran down the blade. And I refuted.

“Who’s the embarrassed one here? I’ll just throw this out there, but the Walt house is a family line that’s been protected by its women for generations! If you think we’ve gotten so far by protecting them… you’re completely off, damn old man!!”

I kicked my father back, but the feeling on impact was extremely heavy. I couldn’t push him back as I wanted, the man instead taking another step in to decapitate me, so I parried it. But as my father suddenly stepped back, my stance crumbled a bit.

Continuing on in his motion, still gripped around his sabre’s hilt,

my father's fist impacted my head. As It shot my helmet off, I made a fist with my open left hand, knocking it into his face.

As my father's helmet flew off, faint as it was, I could see blue lines of light racing across his body. That light as if to form an insignia reminded me of what I saw in my fight with LYLE.

While a cloud of dust rose over the battlefield, we both held similar weapons, using similar styles as we took distance from one another.

It was the first time I'd seen my father in a while, but as I thought, perhaps it was blood in his veins, but he resembled the ancestors. If I had to say who he was closest to, perhaps the Fifth?

As those thoughts ran through my mind, my father disappeared before my eyes. Raising his physical abilities, I'm sure he was going to attack from my blind spot. But I'd already received countless such attacks from LYLE. Time after… time.

… Perhaps he was showing me various things for this moment.

As I caught the sabre thrust with the Katana, the distance between us was extremely close. I could see his face well. On top of irritated, perhaps that was his special move, as he looked surprised.

"You could react to that?"

"I've already done it too many times to count. And you see… I was trained by some strong people. If I lost to something of that level, I'd never be able to look them in the eye!"

Butting his head to make him falter, I brushed my left hand to the side to make lightning. My father leapt back, touching his left hand to the ground…

"You whelp! Sand wall!"

As a wall of dirt rose from the ground, I contrarily held my hand to the sky.

"Thunder clap!"

Thunder roared through the battlefield, lightning struck the earthen wall scattering it to bits. Noticing my father circling around it, I tried cutting at him.

Parrying my slice, he knocked my Katana aside, attempting to pierce his sabre through my head. I tried to avoid it, but the blade moved as if it were a living being to attack me.

However…

“Softer than the Fifth’s!”

The Fifth’s galient blade truly was the worst. Even if you dodged or parried, it would try to draw blood. If you took his attacks too many times, it was more often you’d be rendered immobile by blood loss.

I diverted it with my left hand. The metal protectors on my arms were custom made; something old Letarta prepared for me out of special metal because I didn’t carry a shield.

But even that special metal was dented.

“Kuh! How hard is that?”

I rolled along the ground to take some distance. As I did, my father cut at me. And I parried it with the Katana, but…

“You called me soft, did you? … I’ll send those words right back to you!”

Slipping through the Katana, the tip of his sabre stabbed into a gap in my armor, piercing into my right shoulder. It wasn’t deep, but I wasn’t able to tell what had happened.

I hurriedly tried to separate from him, but those phantasmal stabs continued in succession.

“What’s wrong!? Try parrying these!”

Was he raising his physical abilities, subtly altering his blade’s direction to create an optical illusion? I circled my left hand around

to my back, pulled my gun from its holster and unloading a round into my father." He put his left hand up front to deploy a magic shield.

… The bullet didn't even pierce into it.

"Something of that level won't pierce through my shield. You and father rely too much on guns. But this is the end to that!"

My father stepped in, and in that instant… I felt my line with Monica recover. The sabre in his hand let off light, and as I tried to take his blow with my Katana, it easily shattered. I tried causing a diversion with the gun in my left hand, but his movements were too fast for me to hit.

"Fool! Did you think all I had was restricting Skills!? When I showed you on the first day how easy it was for me to release it!"

Undoing the restriction, he likely planned to use whatever Skill was in that sword to attain victory in an instant. As the gun ran out of bullets, I tossed aside the Katana hilt and gripped the Jewel.

I heard the Third's voice.

『… Now, Lyle, deliver it to Maizel-kun. The Seventh's gift.』

The Jewel's silver ornamental decorations swelled up, coiling around and furnishing my right hand.

I felt a hot flow through my body as the lines of light LYLE put in order formed an insignia on my body similar to Father's.

I directed my right hand at him as I recalled.

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… It was the happenings in the Seventh's room of memories.

Learning his past of being loved, what the Seventh asked was…

『Now then, onto the main subject. Lyle… telling me to disappear means you've already got all you wanted from me? You don't need my teachings anymore?』

The Seventh didn't look too displeased. More than that, if that was what Lyle thought, he would obediently fade away and entrust Lyle his Skill.

But Lyle shook his head.

"That's not it. To speak my honest feelings, I don't want you to disappear. There's still too many things I want you to teach me. And… you're my grandfather, after all."

As Lyle said that, the Seventh.

『In that case, why do you want me to pass on my Skill now? I doubt there will be a stage to use it in a fight with Maizel.』

Thinking of his son Maizel's Skill, there wasn't much meaning in handing down his Skill at the present stage. The Seventh's Third Stage Skill was 【Shuffle】… it allowed him to alter the placement of himself and others.

"… To be honest, the Skill isn't my reason. Seventh, I've been troubling you. You mulled over my father all the way, yet still you did your best."

From the Seventh's point of view, both his father and son were proficient. Sandwiched in between them, he tried to accept it and dote on Maizel.

That's precisely why Lyle came to his conclusion.

"I do not want to show my grandfather the death match of myself and my father."

As Lyle said that with a sorrowful smile, the Seventh was pressed for words.

『… I'm already resolved. There won't be any change in my decision to support you. Even if Maizel is our foe.』

Lyle turned to him.

"I will kill my father."

『…』

"But even if your form is but a memory, I don't want to show that to my grandfather. At least at the very end… I want my grandfather to be smiling… it's just my own selfishness. But won't you listen to my last request?"

As Lyle let out a wrung-out voice, the Seventh looked up at the sky. The Sky of memory was a serene one.

『I see. So I'll be mindful of my grandson to the end… I'm no good as a grandfather after all. I left problems to your generation, and couldn't clean up after them. When there's no helping if you called me the cause of all of this… Lyle, you're talented. And kind. You already surpassed me long ago.』

Giving a powerless laugh, the Seventh turned a smile to Lyle. But there were tears streaming from his eyes.

"Don't worry. Any problems you left behind will be sorted out by your grandson. Because you taught me how to. Well, at the very least, I've grown a bit more twisted than before."

On Lyle's joke, the Seventh chuckled.

『You're right. At the start, you were unreliable, but you were a meek and nice kid. I was a little happy, you know. Maizel was so talented I never got to do anything for him. All I wanted to do, the advice I wanted to give… Lyle, you granted it for me. I truly was glad that you relied on me.』

The two exchanged smiles, and the Skill was passed down. The Seventh began breaking into grains of light, his form gradually fading.

『Lyle, you're a grandson so well-put-together, you're wasted on me.』

"To me, you were a splendid grandfather. Kind, and strong… you're my pride."

『I see. Then I'm no longer needed. Now go on. You just have to do whatever you want to do. Go wherever you want to go.』

As the surrounding scenery crumbled like sand, the area around the Seventh let off a pale light. There, Zenoire drew to his side.

Her mouth moved. While Lyle couldn't hear it, it seems the Seventh could.

『You're right. I've got to properly put it to words. Lyle, you're…』

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The Jewel I held in my right hand took the shape of a gun.

That silver gun with the Jewel embedded in its grip let off a blue light. Its muzzle was large, with a knife furnished on it. It somewhat gave the impression of the Seventh's and Milleia-san's gun coming in union.

And I got the feeling I could hear the Seventh's words.

『… Lyle, you truly were loved. You were born with everyone's love. Your mother Claire loved you. And…』

As I directed my gunpoint, as he had been closing in on me, my father looked surprised. I'll bet he never thought I'd pull a second gun in close quarters.

But he immediately adapted for it.

Perhaps thinking he wouldn't be able to avoid it, he put his left

hand out front, and deployed a magic shield.

“I’ve shown you time and again, guns cannot pierce through my…”

It’s true, perhaps it would be blocked. Even this silver weapon wouldn’t be able to pierce father’s magic shield so easily. But there was no need to pierce to begin with.

“… You panicked. If you kept Skills sealed off, you’d have had a higher chance of victory… this gun is the Seventh himself. You… father, you’ve lost to us… no, to Brod Walt!”

“Father? What are you talking…”

My father looked confused, but I’m sure something came to his mind. Tactics that used firearms. And what I pulled out at the end was a gun as well…

『And… Maizel truly loved you as well.』

I pulled the trigger. A blue light burst from the muzzle, the pale, glowing bullet heading for my father.

Hearing the Seventh’s words, I recalled my father and mother of his memory for an instant. But it was after I’d already fired.

…【Warp】…

Using the Seventh’s Second Skill, the bullet teleported itself to the other side of the Shield. And piercing a little below my father’s chest, it opened a large hole. The bullet went on to fall to the ground, and pop out of existence.

For a brief moment, the battlefield was covered in silence.

Father

What I shot with the silver gun was a blue bullet… a round made of Mana.

As I pulled the trigger, it used the Seventh's Skill 【Warp】 to surpass my father's magic shield, and pierce through his armor. Rather than the pit of his stomach, it opened a hole a little below that.

Staggering on his feet, my father unhanded his sabre. In the battlefield that had gone quiet, I could hear the sound it made as it hit the ground. There was still battle raging on afar, but it gradually grew silent.

Slowly falling over, my father used his left hand to touch his body and confirm the blood…

"… I see, so I lost to my father… and to you, Lyle."

He looked at me as he said it. I didn't know how he was seeing me. Perhaps the sight of me holding a gun was overlapping with the Seventh.

And as I reverted it to its Jewel form, I put the revolver in my left hand back into its holster, still gripping the Jewel as I walked towards my father.

There…

"M-Maizel-sama!"

Beil Randbergh began to panic. The surrounding information came to me through the Valkyries. As I could use Skills, the surrounding terrain alongside the placement of enemies and allies were displayed in my head.

The Valkyries were spreading word of my victory through the battlefield. But agitated knights and soldiers like Beil were beginning to move.

“Step back!”

Perhaps Beil used a Skill, as he approached us with inhumanly swift movements. It was stopped by Aria’s Skill.

“I told you not to get in their way!”

As the fact they could use Skills spread, Miranda didn’t remain silent.

“With this, I can get serious… now stand down or you’ll die!”

Producing wires from her fingers on both hands, she began tying and severing soldiers. By the time the battlefield grew noisy once more, I had reached my father.

Leaning over, I looked at his face as he held the hole opened up in his body. With all the blood he was losing, rather than pale, I would call him dark. His face was sullied by the dust clouds of the battlefield, and it looked like he was having a hard time to move.

But he was making a face of relief.

“… I wonder why. Right now, I feel quite liberated.”

“That’s good.”

“Lyle… how old are you?”

“I turn seventeen this year.”

It was around spring when I left the house. Thinking back to that, it had been almost two years since I went outside. So much had happened. It felt as if it had been so long, and yet it had passed in an instant…

“… I see. Seventeen, eh? Then you’ll have to have your first campaign… wait, did I buy a horse for you yet? I’ve got to prepare equipment… if I put in the order at once… and preparing a bride… no, were you engaged to Novem? I can’t seem to remember.”

His memories were muddled, as if he had forgotten all that had

happened to now… my father was seeing me as a son. It felt like I was going to cry. But as I extended my arm, I saw the blood that stained his left hand..

"… So it wasn't a dream. I see, I lost."

As my father spat up blood, I turned to him and nodded. Reaching out my right hand, I grabbed both of his.

"… I'm sorry, father. I didn't have any other means! … for being such an inept son… I'm sorry."

And my father got his breathing in order as he closed his eyes. He smiled, just a bit.

"What are you talking about. After troubling you so, you still call me father. I'm the inept one. But it seems that's over as well. My body won't move. I want to apologize. To you… there's so much I wanted to say, but…"

He coughed up blood, the red soaking into the parched earth. As he cleared his throat, and I gave his right hand a strong grip, the Jewel let off some light.

"T-there are things I want to say. But what you need to do for now… L-Lyle… declare your victory. You won against me. Finish me off. And… put a stop to Celes. That one's my daughter. The Walt House… *hack*!"

As he coughed blood and stopped talking, I nodded. And spoke.

"Rest at ease. I'll definitely stop her. So…"

I didn't know what I was supposed to say. My father laughed.

"Ah… my apologies. I'll be going first to get a scolding from my father. You should take your time getting there. Celes… once she comes to this side, I'll have some choice words…"

My father took one deep breath, and stopped moving. I stood gripping the Jewel.

“Maizel Walt was… defeated by me, Lyle Walt! Stop this battle at once, and surrender!”

The Jewel let off a pale light. The third in the Jewel spoke up.

『Is this… Anti-Skill? No, it’s not.』

Blue grains of light rained over the battlefield, and the enemy soldiers that touched it suddenly collapsed on the spot. Beil, locked in battle with Aria, opened his eyes wide and stood stock still. Holding up his weapon, he looked at me.

“… Lyle-sama.”

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The left flank.

The one holding up the troublesome Forxuz House was Novem, a Forxuz herself. Holding up her staff, she had it take up the form of a scythe as she pointed towards her father and brother.

While she was taking on both opponents rushing at her, she still had the leisure to look up at the blue light raining down. Those specks that came down like snow… Novem held out her right hand and gripped one.

“… Lyle-sama, my condolences.”

She muttered sorrowfully.

The Valkyrie by her side reported the situation.

“Novem-san, the enemy has become powerless. It is likely related to this light… and some have begun to flee. But a majority of them seem unable to grasp the present situation.”

Novem looked up at the sky.

Her father Jared and brother Elbert, with weapons in hand were the same. Jared spoke.

“… So Maizel-sama is gone.”

“Father.”

Jared removed his helmet, and touched his own sword to his neck.

“That’s enough. I served the previous generation and Maizel-sama. As the current head, I’ll take responsibility. That’s all there is to it. You should surrender and follow Lyle-sama’s orders. Whether you’re executed or taken as a subordinate, move as a member of the Forxuz House.”

Elbert looked down as he nodded. And sheathing away his sword, he tossed it towards Novem.

“Novem… I surrender.”

The kindness Novem directed to Lyle wasn’t directed towards her family. She took her brother’s sword in her right hand, and simply gave a nod before turning to her father.

“I’ll leave brother’s sword with Lyle-sama. Anything else you wish to leave?”

There, her father Jared laughed. Rather than not bearing his impending death, he had a few things to say about his daughter.

“Ahahaha, Novem… you really are honest. Your family’s dying over here. Show a bit of sorrow. Otherwise you’ll creep Lyle out.”

Hearing that, Novem.

“Then I shall do that when Lyle-sama is around.”

Jared cut into his neck and spat up blood. At the end…

“Whatever the case… with this, the Forxuz House’s role is…”

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Nearby the tent at the main camp.

Stepping onto the loading deck of the Porter parked nearby, I watched the forms of the surrendering soldiers. They all made expressions as if they couldn't believe it.

Hanging the Jewel on my neck, I confirmed it with the Third.

"I wonder what happened. I thought we would have to fight a while longer, but light suddenly flowed from the Jewel… and rained down on the battlefield."

Recalling that previous spectacle, I asked the Third. There wasn't anyone around me. No, they just weren't coming close.

They were being tactful, guarding me from a little away.

『Like hell I know? Well, perhaps this is the Jewel's power as well. The one who made this Jewel was the powerful Septem after all. An existence over Agrissa. Would it be a luxury to shout at her saying if she could do something like that, she should have done it sooner? … But perhaps it was the influence of Maizel-kun's Skill. I can't make any conclusions. Good grief, it's precisely at times like these that I wish Milleia-chan was here.』

The Third gave a joke-mingled answered, but I got the feeling he was being tactful. Now wanting to shoe my teary, swollen eyes to the others, I forced a laugh.

"You've got a point."

『Lyle, I understand if you want to cry, but endure it a bit. Sorry, but that's just the sort of position you have right now. But make some time for yourself later. If you do, you can go on as things were. I'm sure it'll just keep getting busier.』

From the Jewel that once let out so many voices it could be called noisy, only the Third's voice would ever come out. I found it a little

lonely.

“… Third, was my father freed from Celes at the end?”

『Let’s see. I think he was. But even so, for the means to release a charmed soul to be killing them… and Maizel-kun put some sort of influence on the Jewel. Because of that, you might have a means to free the other charmed folk, but who knows.』

I would’ve liked to have obtained it before it came to this.

“… What should I do about my mother?”

『Even if she’s released, I think she’ll be punished. It all depends on you, but it will be harsh, considering what‘s to come. Those around will definitely demand a heavy punishment. If you go soft, you’ll be telling everyone how soft you are. Well, I don’t think you should use any torture. They’ll wonder why you’d go so far against family.』

“It sure is a hard problem.”

『That’s right. It’s hard. In this world, finding balance is a difficult thing. Well, that’s just how it is. You should learn your own way to find balance. To be honest, whatever comes from here onwards is an unknown world to me. To add onto that, there’s no such thing as absolute right.』

I wanted to make a bit of time to sort out my heart.

If it was someone I hated, perhaps it would have been easier. But in the Seventh’s memory, I truly was loved. I was able to learn that. I learned… but that only saddened me more.

There, the Third spoke.

『At times like these, you should rely on women. They’re stronger at these sorts of things, and more than anything, you’ve got plenty of those sorts of children around you.』

As he spoke in his usual light tone, I refuted.

“I’ve got too many of them that even if I rely on someone, I’ll raise some thorns. Good grief, whose fault do you think this is?”

『Oh, so you’ve finally grown the balls to say it.』

The Third laughed. Laughed, and comforted me in his own way.

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… Baldoir made his way to Beil, who’d become a prisoner of war.

His weapon removed, unlike the soldiers who were gathered in one place, Beil had a standing with some responsibility. When Baldoir showed up, he was alone.

In the prison of iron, he sat with proper posture.

“… So you’ve come. I’m glad, Baldoir.”

“Uncle. I’m sure Lyle-sama will be here soon. Please ask whatever you want when the time comes.”

While Beil’s expression was tired, his eyes were serious.

“I can’t say I don’t have a face to show him. But could you make some promises?”

“… If it’s within an extent I’m capable of.”

Beil looked at his nephew Baldoir, smiling a little.

“I’ll take responsibility. Otherwise, I’ll be dragging Lyle-sama’s feet. Execution is most desirable. But I seek a lenient punishment for the others. And… as a man of the Randbergh House, continue serving Lyle-sama from here on. I’m sure that was my brother’s intent when he sent you to serve under him, right?”

Baldoir looked at Beil and nodded.

“… Yes. I came with close to three hundred soldiers from the territory.”

Beil laughed.

“As expected of my brother. He’s nothing like me. Right… completely different from me.”

As Beil looked down regretfully, Baldoir posed the question.

“Uncle, what exactly happened in the Walt house’s mansion? Didn’t you ever feel Lyle-sama’s cold reception was unnatural?”

Beil gave his answer as he was.

“… It will only amount to an excuse, but I thought it was right. No, I moved just how I was told. I never questioned it. That Celes-sama was the one worthy of the house… when I think back on it, why did I try to make Celes-sama the head? Even I can’t explain it. But even I once had my hopes on Lyle-sama. There were many like me. We really… expected great things of him.”

Baldoir had seen Bahnseim’s suicidal soldiers in her cage. And even with his family freed here to talk to, there weren’t any means to save him. For the world wouldn’t believe such a tale.

“Uncle, you could change your name, and as a single knight, serve Lyle-sama…”

“I have my own pride. And I think it best Maizel-sama have more company. The Forxuz House head killed himself. I’ll take responsibility and follow after.”

It seems he was already resolved, and Baldoir wasn’t able to persuade him any further…

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… Within the Jewel, the round table room.

There were only two seats with doors behind them. Of the eight chairs, six had been lost, with silver weapons floating over where they once were.

『The First's greatsword… the Second's bow… the Fourth's dagger… the Fifth's galient blade… the Sixth's halberd… and the Seventh's gun, huh. I wonder if my sword will fall short?』

Even if he spoke to himself, there was no one to respond. The Third thought.

(How ironic. The only Walt to die young is the last to remain. If I had gone and disappeared earlier, it would've been much easier.)

But they each had a meaning. The Third could think back on it like that come this far. The First granted Lyle change. The Second strengthened his heart. The Sixth taught him how to conduct himself on the battlefield and express himself, the Fourth mainly taught internal affairs… the Fifth gave Lyle his feelings. And the Seventh gave the truth he was loved.

『What I can leave? I really don't have anything besides my Skill… good grief, it really is troublesome if everyone arbitrarily gets their expectations up.』

Since the Second left. They had discussed who would stay in the Jewel to the end. But in the end, because of the level of difficulty behind their Skills, the Third and Seventh remained.

『I barely have anything to teach him. Should I just hand my Skill over and end it already?』

Even if he said his usual jokes, no one responded.

The silver weapons merely floated above the round table.

『… I want to watch over him to the end; I guess thinking that way is no good. But it looks like the end was entrusted to me, so I do hope I have something to leave to him.』

Not in his usual aloof tone, the Third spilled his true feelings…

Epilogue

… The Bahnseim Kingdom, Centralle.

In a private room of the castle… or rather, a room too large to call it as such, Celes was selecting a dress. Taking her favorite dress in her hands, she prepared to receive her father who was coming to Centralle.

But on the words of the maid who entered the room, Celes froze. Celes's mother Claire who had been selecting out a dress beside her touched both hands to her mouth in surprise.

Celes, with the dress still in both her hands.

"… What did you say? What did you just say!?"

Her favorite clothes ripped, and she took her own rapier-concealing staff from automaton Bert, who stood nearby. The Yellow Jewel buried in its hilt let off a faint light.

The maid spoke.

"B-by the reports, the Walt Army invaded Beim. But… the Walt House Head, Count Maizel was killed in action. The army has surrendered, and faced d… defeat!"

Seeing the kneeling maid, Celes' body began to shake.

(It couldn't be… why… I mean, father is strong. There's no way he'd lose to leftovers like him. There's no way that small fry could… Novem. I see, Novem did it. That damn bitch!)

Clenching her molars, the force she used to grip her staff increased. There, she heard Agrissa's voice.

『… Poor girl. You lost your dear father? But you can't just stay angry. Shall I guess what you're thinking? Let's see… Novem did it. That's what're on your mind.』

Celes hit the maid who delivered such detestable news away with

her staff. She dragged the dresses left around the room with her, flying all the way to the wall.

While she barely survived, she was at death's door. Celes' breath was out of orders, her eyes open wide.

"No… Maizel was… that man can't have…"

Seeing her mother crumbling at the knees and hiding her face with both eyes as she wept, Celes embraced her.

"Mother. I… I'm…!"

"Celes!"

Her mother Clair clung to Celes. And the two of them shed tears. Watching over them, Bert issued orders around.

"Carry the injured off and treat her. And vacate the area."

The maids moved just as ordered, while the quilin in the room, Rummel just stated absentmindedly at the ceiling as she sat on the floor.

Agrissa spoke to Celes.

『Unfortunately, I doubt Novem laid a hand on Maizel. While she may have been indirectly related, that thing wouldn't lay a hand on him. In that case, the one who defeated Maizel was…』

Celes lost the light in her clear clue eyes, a wrinkle gracing her brow.

"That damn bastard. I even spared him because Novem told me to. He went and killed my father… when he's just washed up leftover… mere kitchen waste…"

Agrissa contained her urge to laugh as she called out to Celes.

『Do you detest him, Celes? Then why not grant him all the pain of the world? But before that… you'll have to carry out your dear father's funeral. You need to prepare a splendid grave for your

beloved father. Right… to make sure your father isn't lonely, you should bury quite a few with him. Let's bury ten thousand people together. If you do, your father will never be lonely.』

Hearing that statement she couldn't think sane, Celes noticed.

"T-that's right. I have to hold a memorial service for father. I have to keep a grip or else… mother?"

"Give me a minute, Celes. A little is enough. Let me cry for now."

Seeing her mother like that, Celes took action that would surprise any other.

"I-I understand. I'll wait. Celes will wait as long as you want."

If anyone beside her parents told Celes to wait, it would become something terrible. And she felt no discomfort being told that by her mother.

… Why was that?

It was simple. The existence called Celes had a tendency to adhere to its parents. It was the same for Agrissa. But with Agrissa and Celes colored by madness, their thoughts diverged from the common man.

『… Celes, do you want to be with your mother forever?』

"Of course I do. If we're not together forever… I, I'll…"

Agrissa laughed in the Jewel. Her mouth warping, she spoke to Celes.

『Then just keep her by your side forever. Maizel didn't make it in time, but as long as you collect up his corpse, there won't be a problem. You've already gotten full control over, 'that skill'. If you use it, you'll be with your mother forever. I'm envious, Celes.』

Agrissa, who really did feel jealous, was obsessed with the thing called parents as well. It wasn't as if Septem alone had an abnormal adherence.

Celes looked at her mother embracing her.

“… I see. Eureka! That’s right! Mother, with this, we’ll be together forever! Father will be back in no time!”

“Celes, what are you…”

Celes made sure not to cause her mother any pain as she pulled her rapier and sliced through her neck. Clinging to her mother’s head, she let the blood pouring from her neck dye her body as she made a delighted face.

“Together forever. Forever… ah, I see. We have to collect my father’s remains.”

『Then should we put the funeral on hold? No, I haven’t seen one of those in a long time. Celes, reclaiming Maizel’s remains is important, but could you proceed the preparations on the funeral for me? I… have an urge to see ten thousand humans in pain.』

Bathed in her mother’s blood, Celes tapered her mouth. She wanted to complain to Agrissa, but she was a foe Celes couldn’t go against too strongly.

“Yeah, yeah, got it. I’ll do it, jeez. Well, reclaiming a portion of father’s corpse comes first. I’d like the three of us to get together for a party soon.”

『A party, eh? I never get tired of you.』

Celes preciously held her mother’s head as she activated a Skill.

“Mother… now come back to me.”

Her mother’s head floated through the air, her own body and blood nearby recycling itself and reverting. No, it couldn’t be called a reversion. She wasn’t alive any longer.

But Clair regained her former form.

“Celes, why are you so dirty? Oh, there’s no helping you. Let’s go to the baths together and get you all cleaned up.”

There stood her mother, the same as in her life. Celes smiled.

“I’m sorry, mother. But with this, we can see father at once. I’m so relieved.”

Claire smiled as well.

“That’s right. It’s a relief, Celes.”

Agrissa let her voice out from the Jewel.

『It sure feels nice to do a good thing. I’ve a longing for some cries of death and agony, Celes. And… Lyle, was it? For him to climb up from there, as I thought, he’s got something to him.』

Celes pretended she didn’t hear Agrissa’s voice…

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“Your feelings won’t change?”

In the underground dungeons of Rhuvenns castle, I faced Beil. An individual I once admired as a knight, but now he had thinned down a bit.

In his cell, he kneeled towards me with proper posture.

“… This body of mine can no longer serve you. I cannot forget anything and pretend not to know as I work under my liege. The Randbergh House pledges its devotion for life. I’m sure Baldoir will serve you well.”

It seems his resolve wouldn’t change.

He spoke of everything pertaining to Bahnseim’s internal affairs, and left loads of info with me. But when I proposed he change his name and serve me, he refused.

“Baldoir does do good work. I have considerable good will for the

Randbergh House, and…”

“That’s unnecessary! And with your current position, if you don’t hand judgement to those responsible, you’ll sow seeds of discord. I cannot trouble you any further. By all means!”

Why was he so hurried to rush to his grave?

Can’t he live a little easier?

The Third let out a voice from the Jewel.

『… Good grief, the Randbergh House is way too earnest. He should live his life just a little bit easier.』

He sounded a little sadder than usual.

“… I have no grudge against you as an individual. That’s simply how great a threat Celes was. And that one is my sister. A person of the Walt House. I think you’ve only been troubled by our affairs.”

Beil spoke.

“Your words are wasted on me. I am already resolved. Whether it be torture, or an incredibly brutal execution…”

I’d like to think we’re different, but in the end are we the same? I always held such a question in my mind. I held it, but even so, I thought to challenge Celes.

“… I’m sorry I couldn’t save you. It’s my responsibility.”

It’s not as if my life was the only one twisted by Celes. Starting with Beil before my eyes, many humans were driven mad.

“I truly apologize, Lyle-sama!”

Beil let his tears flow, letting sobs leak out.

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Going out to the terrace of my room, I looked up at the sky.

The morning air was cold, but right now, I wanted the pain it stung into my skin. Normally, I would've shivered at this temperature, but I didn't feel anything right now.

I felt some warmth behind me. A coat had been draped over my back.

"Oh, it's just you, Monica."

When I said that without turning around, Monica sounded all high and mighty.

"Trying to look cool, immersed in your sentimental shit isn't fitting of a chicken like you. For covering you up before you exposed all your bad points to the world to the extent you'd catch a cold, I don't mind if you offer me some more words of love, you know. I love you, is enough. I'll answer your call with all I have! This Monica will answer a Chicken dickwad's love at full force."

"… Shut it. It's because you keep asking me to say I love you that I never get to say it. Why don't you learn the subtlety that comes with that field."

There, Monica's twin tails swayed in the wind as she looked at me with a serious dace.

"It's the dere. The chicken dickwad has finally shown his dere! I won! As I thought, this Monica will be the one to win in the end after all!"

Spreading her arms out wide, Monica happily raced around the terrace.

"The winner? What are you talking about?"

There, Monica acted bashful.

"Oh surely you jest. I'm talking about the chicks. Who you'll love

the most, and who'll you'll entrust the first chick to. The Valkyries are having a factional dispute, quite an intense quarrel over who's going to look after them."

The Third in the Jewel was surprised, and I covered my face with my left hand as well.

『Eh～ the automatons have faction wars as well? What a pain.』

"… Can you guys stop calling my children chicks? Or rather, why did it come to that? If I touch anyone right now, everything will take a turn for the worse."

Monica jumped for joy as she spoke to me.

"Unfortunately, it's a road you can't go down by going around. Well, since I'm your number one, your first night and looking after your chicks should obviously be left to…"

Monica's words left me staring blankly, but it truly was a road I couldn't avoid. However, I wanted to evade the carnage. I gripped the Jewel.

It seems the Third inferred my feelings as he laughed.

『Sorry, I've got no advice. I finally noticed it you know… your harem's already exceeded the maximum permissible dosage. You should see a doctor.』

… Isn't it considerably bad that he's only noticing that now? When I was sensing my limits long ago, it's no joke if he's just looking back now.

The Third spoke as if reading me.

『I opened my eyes. As I thought, rather than a harem, I'd rather love a single woman. Laying hands on numerous women is a brute's path.』

You're the one who pushed the harem onto me! I endured shouting that out as I calmed down my heart.

Calm down, it isn't anything I can turn back. I can't change this flow anymore. Innis-san told me. It's impossible to avoid the carnage. The important thing is to make it as small as possible.

… Dangit! No matter what I do, nothing but carnage awaits, what a life!

At that moment.

I had an awfully bad premonition. This sort of… feeling of loss I felt with my father…

"What's this?"

I didn't feel anything as I looked around. The Skills showed no reaction either. Monica looked at me.

"What's wrong? Ah! If you're worried about your first night, then rest at ease. This Monica was initialized with various…"

"Don't joke around. No, I feel this sort of sense of loss. Perhaps I'm feeling a little sad with my father's death. I'm going to rest."

Saying that, I returned to my room. Monica hung her head.

"… Treating me as a joke? Not lusting after me as he keeps me by his side? This is the best!"

Seeing as she was as tenacious as ever, I looked out the terrace. Exactly what was that sensation?